Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

Edmond Hamilton — Arthur J. Burks — Arlton Eadie
Seabury Quinn — Nictzin Dyalhis — Everil Worrell

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Weird Tales

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VOLUME XII NUMBER 3

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Contents for September, 1928

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THE EYRIE

I TAKE this opportunity to send a few lines of appreciation of your unique magazine, which seems to improve with age," writes W. H. Wakefield, of Toronto, Canada, in a letter to The Eyrie. "Out of all the stories that you have published in the past, two dominate in my mind: *The Outsider,* by H. P. Lovecraft, which is as fine a story of its type as Poe ever penned; and A. Merritt's story, *The Woman of the Wood,* dealing with trees which took human shape. A number of my friends read both of these stories, and all agreed that both were without a peer in their respective classes."

Writes Donald G. Ward, of Auburn, New York: "WEIRD TALES is slowly getting better and better, and the stories you give us now seem to me to be approaching the *n*th degree of interest. I have my favorites, and these are the scientific stories. You have me all 'het up' by your announcement of coming features by Edmond Hamilton. He certainly is a genius, although his last story, *The Dimension Terror,* didn't seem to be up to his usual standard. H. P. Lovecraft is another of my favorites. I always liked tales that depart from earthly standards, and hence went wild about *The Call of Cthulhu,* a masterpiece of weird fiction if there ever was one."

Edwin Beard, a thirteen-year-old reader from St. Louis, writes enthusiastically: "*The Space-Eaters!* Whoopee! That was a frigid, stark tale of horror, believe me. It gave me chills up my spine like cold steel knives laid on a cold back. (Incidentally, I found out, by accident, that this does give one horrible chills.)"

Jack T. Whitfield, of Penn Yan, New York, writes to The Eyrie: "Frank Belknap Long, Jr., has written some wonderfully weird stories, but his latest—*The Space-Eaters,* in your July issue—surpasses anything he has written before. It is beautifully weird, and his style is in a class by itself. I started this story at 12 o'clock and finished at exactly five minutes of 1. It held me absolutely in its grip. I was spellbound. I just drank in every word slowly, it thrilled me so. I hope more of his stories are on the way."

Writes Alvin V. Pershing, of Barberton, Ohio: "I get off work at midnight.

(Continued on page 421)

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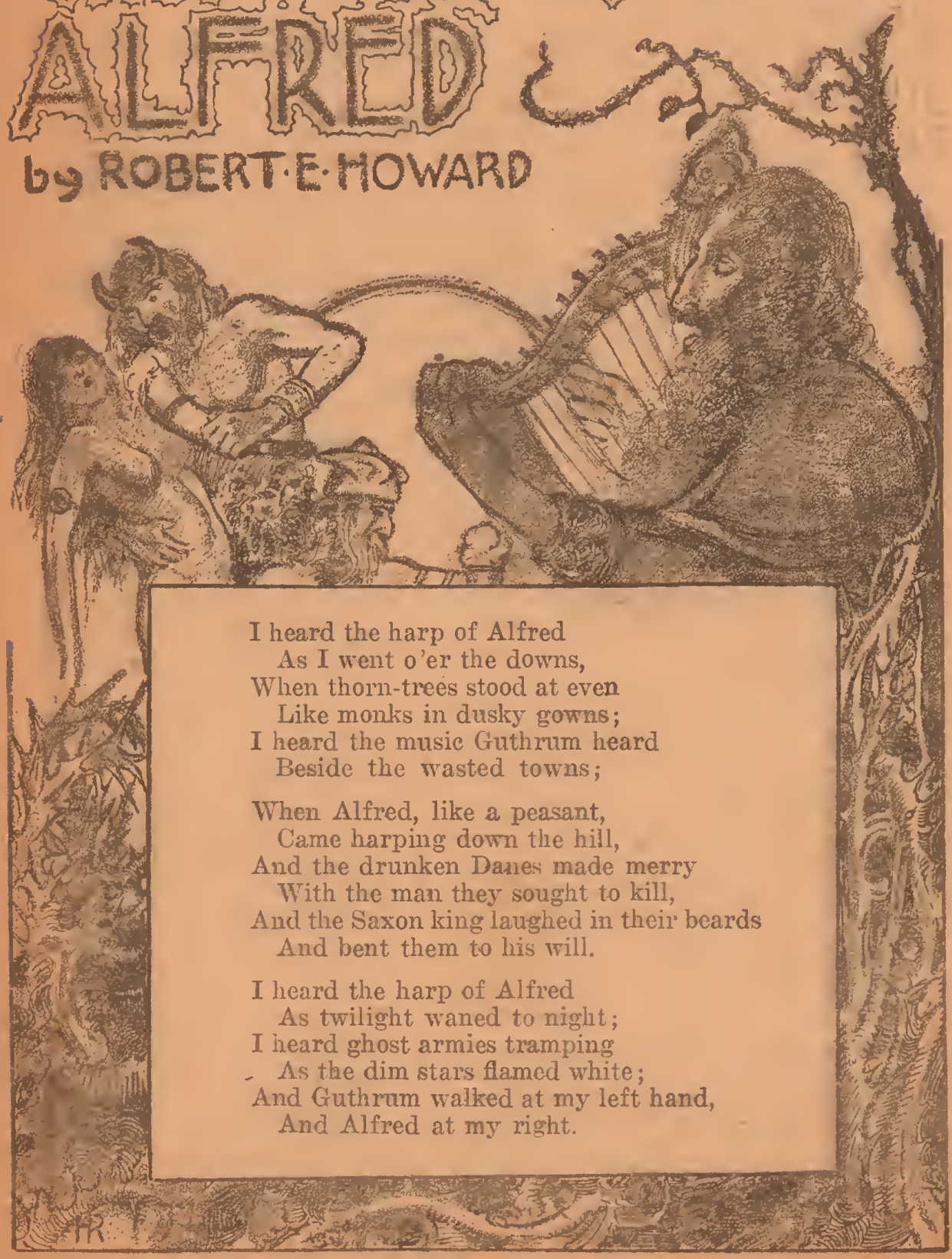
The HARP of ALFRED

by ROBERT·E·HOWARD



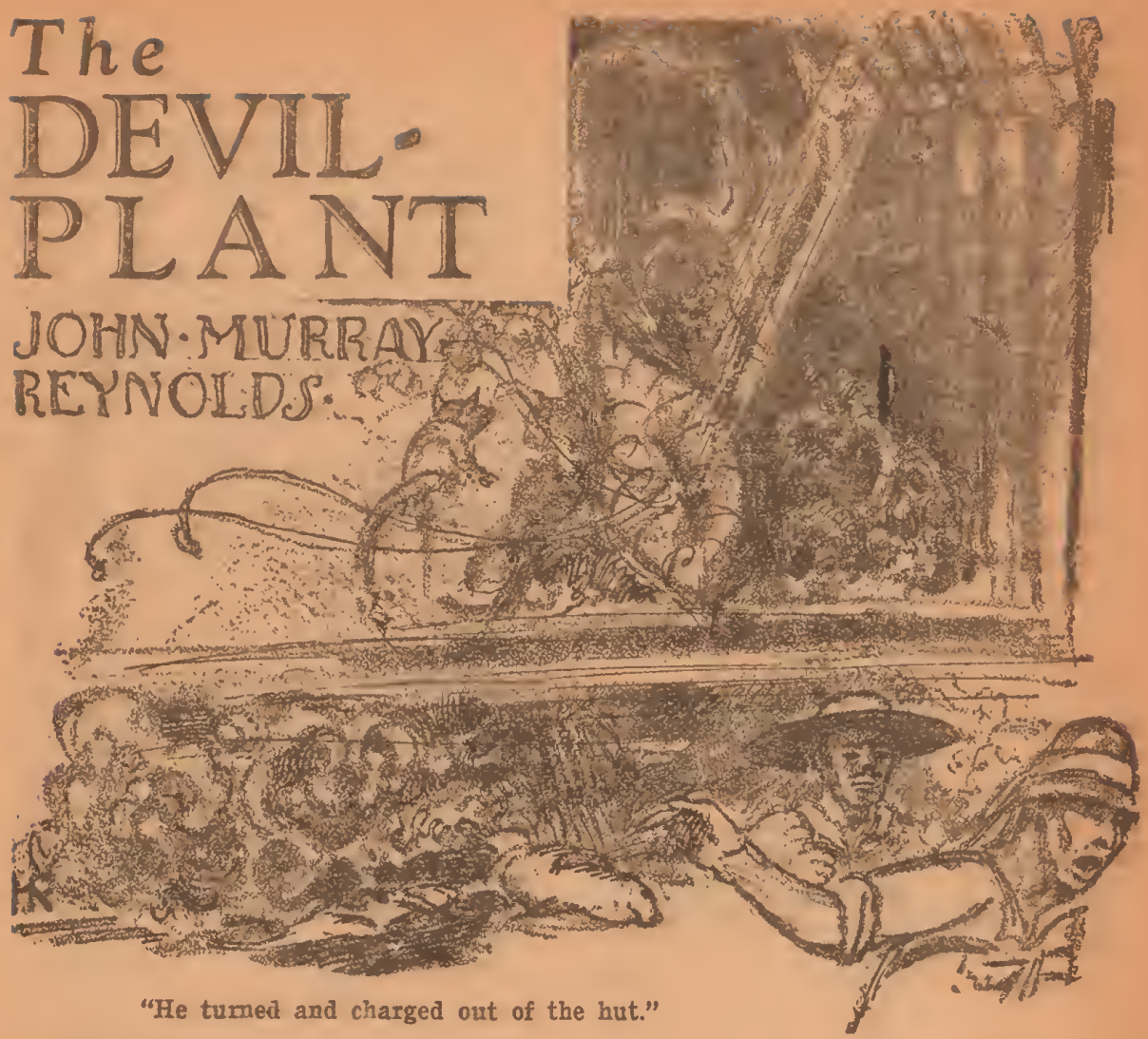
I heard the harp of Alfred
As I went o'er the downs,
When thorn-trees stood at even
Like monks in dusky gowns;
I heard the music Guthrum heard
Beside the wasted towns;

When Alfred, like a peasant,
Came harping down the hill,
And the drunken Danes made merry
With the man they sought to kill,
And the Saxon king laughed in their beards
And bent them to his will.

I heard the harp of Alfred
As twilight waned to night;
I heard ghost armies tramping
As the dim stars flamed white;
And Guthrum walked at my left hand,
And Alfred at my right.

The DEVIL-PLANT

JOHN·MURRAY·REYNOLDS·



"He turned and charged out of the hut."

THE public will recall the disappearance of Jonathan Darrowby, about four years ago. A noted explorer, he went alone into the jungles of Brazil and never returned. Nothing was known of him until the so-called "Darrowby Manuscript" was found, a little less than a year ago.

At first that strange document, "The Darrowby Manuscript," was believed to be a hoax. What it related was so weird, so horribly unbelievable, that it was thought to be a practical joke or the product of a diseased imagination. But now that the handwriting has been definitely established as that of Jonathan Darrowby, and Professor Briggs has located the site of Palaos, there is no longer any doubt of the authenticity of the papers.

The manuscript, or rather diary, is written in a small, leather-covered note-book. It was found on a shelf in a junk store in Para, still wrapped in the oiled silk that had protected it when found floating down the river three years before, tied to a piece of wood. The first part contained valuable but technical and rather dull notes on the author's explorations, but the last few pages are here reproduced exactly as written. *J. M. R.*

FEBRUARY 18. Arrived at Palaos today. Came here just after noon, a little mud flat at the junction of the Orinoco with a smaller stream. Desolate little place. Dark jungle

walls crowding close on each hand, the muddy river flowing by, and then the delta—with half a dozen miserable hovels raised on shaky piles above the mud and a larger house (this one) standing alone behind. One of these inexplicable little settlements, fungus growths that spring up in out-of-the-way places and drag out monotonous existences. It's damp and unhealthful and fever-ridden, but it is like heaven after weeks of the jungle alone.

Natives had told me that a white man lived here, but I hadn't really believed it till I saw this house. Then I knew it was true; you could tell at first glance no native had built it. I wanted to shout aloud at the prospect of someone to talk to after weeks of lonely silence.

As I stood there on the river bank a moment, just before splashing through the shallows of the smaller stream and crossing to the village, there came a faint breeze. It was blowing *from* Palaos, and it brought a mixed odor of garbage and wet bamboo and unclean humanity. Then a new smell came down on the strengthening breeze. The odor was faint and undefinable, but it was definitely unclean—evil. A phrase once used by an old river boatman recurred to mind: "The Devil breathes behind Palaos, *Senhor!*" The Devil's Breath! The thing is well named, whatever it is. Then the breeze died and the smell was no longer perceptible. With a shrug I waded through the shallows and came to Palaos.

When near enough to this house I shouted, and the owner walked out on the porch and waved his hand.

"Hello, friend," he called cheerfully in English. "Come on in. Glad to see you."

He is a queer little man, my host, this dweller in the heart of the jungle. He is fat and rotund, but he can not be over five feet two or three inches in height and his frame is so small that his actual bulk is not great in spite of his stoutness. The lower half of his face is hidden by a bushy and unkempt black beard, and he wears the thickest spectacles I have ever seen. The heavy lenses give his eyes a distorted look. At least, I think it's the lenses. Sometimes I'm inclined to believe there is something a little queer about the eyeballs themselves.

In such far-flung sentry posts as this there is little that is artificial. The man with the beard did not even invite me to stay: it was a foregone conclusion that I would share his house. As I slipped the pack from my shoulders he took it from me. He carried it in here and laid it on the floor beside one of the two cots in the bedroom.

The little room has a floor of rough boards covered with a coarse matting, and the walls are of smooth poles. Beyond the netting-filled window this afternoon was a world of sunlight with the river a brown smear across the green of the jungle; now it is a patch of warm blackness with insects buzzing ineffectually against the netting.

"Make yourself c o m f o r t a b l e, friend," my host told me. "There is water, and you will find a towel hanging on the nail. You will wish to change your clothes, no? Somewhere I have a suit that is for me a little big; perhaps you can wear it. I will search."

WHAT a relief to wash up and shed my travel-stained clothing! The white duck provided by my host is tight across the shoulders and very short in the arms and legs, but it can be worn. When finished, I found him out on the wide porch, sitting in a long chair with a palm-leaf fan in one hand and a long-stemmed amber and meerschaum pipe in the other. He was reading a French scientific book.

"Well, friend," he said when I appeared, "how do you feel now?"

I started to thank him, but he only made spluttering noises and refused

to let me. Seems to be one of those people who are embarrassed by gratitude. Incidentally, I can't quite place his accent. It seems predominantly German, but at times it holds certain peculiar undertones I have noticed in the speech of Russians. He has not told me his origin and I have not asked. It is always better not to.

"Well, friend"—he inevitably addresses me that way—"my name is Wanless. You have not heard of me, no?"

I had to admit that I hadn't, and he laid down his pipe and slapped his plump thigh and laughed uproariously. Seemed to consider it a huge joke. At last he subsided into quiet chuckles, then added:

"No, friend, not yet. But you will. A time will come when the whole world will know the name of Wanless. I have patience. I can wait, and it will not be long now."

We sat talking all afternoon. Not for many dragging weeks have I seen a white man, and it must be years since the last one visited Palaos. Wanless tells me he has not been over a hundred miles down the river in more than ten years.

A girl came at his call and brought us drinks—necessarily warm and without ice, but refreshing for all that. I was rather surprized to see the girl. Wanless hadn't struck me as a man who would go in for that sort of thing. She is some kind of a mixed breed, part Portuguese and part Indian. Tall and slender and rather good-looking. She wore a shapeless dress of very dirty white cotton and had a square of scarlet silk tied over her head and knotted at the side. Her hair is black and straight, quite fine and silky, evidently a heritage from her Portuguese blood. Wanless calls her Lucia.

The relationship between the two is rather puzzling. Wanless tells me he bought the girl from a passing trader, a man who abducted her from some down-river settlement and then tired of her unsubdued hatred. He also says he keeps her because she seems contented and is useful around the house, but the instinctive and unthinking consideration he shows the girl convinces me that his feeling really goes deeper. As for Lucia, it is evident that she worships him.

Wanless has gone to bed and is snoring loudly; I stayed up to get these notes in shape. God! What a relief it will be to sleep in a bed again, even a little iron cot, after weeks of the jungle!

FEBRUARY 19. Loafed around and rested up most of the day. It is pleasant to sit in a chair on the porch and do nothing at all. In a day or so, after a little rest, I will move on.

Wanless and the girl puzzle me more all the time. There is another factor in their relationship, one more difficult to understand. It is fear. That Wanless is unaffected by the fear is evident; that he is not the immediate cause of it is equally so. But I hadn't seen Lucia half a dozen times before I was convinced that the girl lives in mortal terror of—what? Something. It shows in her eyes; there is a latent horror in their depths that is never entirely absent.

In the middle of the afternoon Wanless joined me on the porch and we yarned till twilight began to dim the outlines of the mud flats before us and the jungle behind. We spoke of the jungle and its ways, of the million unanswered mysteries of South America's dark interior, and of the fascination and repugnance of this Orinoco country. But mostly we talked of the varied life that teems in these muddy waters and throughout the fever-ridden thickets behind. I know a good deal about them myself, but Wanless' knowledge is extraor-

dinary. He has a keen faculty of observation, and an immense fund of scientific knowledge. It was just before sunset that he showed me his garden.

That man *is* a botanist! I firmly believe he knows more about flowers and plants and their ways than any man who has ever lived. And his garden is superb. He has a wonderful assortment of growing things, ranging all the way from giant orchids that would set any flower show crazy to miniature *nyctoginaceæ* that are marvels of delicacy. I begin to realize that the man is a genius. Such of his chubby face as showed above the black beard beamed with delight at my enthusiasm.

Not all the plants in that garden are beautiful, however. Some are a little too queer for that. They are crosses. There is a whole section full of new varieties which Wanless has obtained by crossing and recrossing existing species. It is evidently the branch of his work in which he is most keenly interested, but I can't share his enthusiasm. It might be different with someone else, but I have never liked the idea of trying to set aside nature's laws in that manner. It is dangerous.

Somehow I don't think I shall ever forget that moment—the two of us standing there in that misplaced garden, with a red sun setting behind the jungle and the old Orinoco slipping muddily by. On one side the beautiful flowers with the giant orchids above them, and on the other those queer, perverted plants.

Then there came the faint stirring of a breeze. The underbrush swayed slightly, a few ripples ran across the stagnant ponds in the hollows of the mud flats, and an occasional palm frond rustled softly. Then the breeze quickened, and with it came the smell. Vile, unclean, revolting, it was the same that had greeted me when first I looked on Palaos.

The words of the old river-man again came back to me: "The Devil breathes behind Palaos, *Senhor!*" Hastily I turned to Wanless.

"What is that?" I asked.

"What is what, friend?"

"The breeze, that unholy smell!" I said impatiently.

Wanless looked at me for a long moment. Almost he spoke, then he seemed to change his mind and it was as though the shutters of his brain had closed. He shrugged.

"Who knows? The jungle has many smells, none of them pleasant!"

"Isn't that what they call 'The Devil's Breath'?" I persisted.

"Who knows?" he repeated. "I listen to no legends. Shall we go into the house?"

Whatever he knows, and I am certain he knows something, he is evidently determined to say no more at the time.

FEBRUARY 22. There is something strangely vivid about this place. The raw colors, the varied smells, the steaming noonday, the chill mists of dawn, all leave strong and not too pleasant impressions.

Nothing particular has happened, but Palaos is getting on my nerves very badly. I just get comfortable in a chair on the porch, when all at once the palms along the jungle edge begin to quiver with moving airs and the Devil's Breath comes down on the wind. Then I jump to my feet and restlessly pace the long porch, sucking on an empty pipe, till the breeze dies.

Today Wanless showed me his laboratory. I don't know the source of his income, but it must be quite substantial. That laboratory is a marvel of completeness—all the more remarkable because it is way up the Orinoco and back of nowhere. Everything in it has been transported for thousands of miles. My eye happened to be caught by half a dozen glass

domes that stood against one wall. They were about the shape of the old helmets policemen used to wear, but two or three times the size.

"What are those used for?" I asked.

Wanless smiled. "Well, friend, I do not use them at all in my work any more. Some day I will show you what I did with them, but not now."

FEBRUARY 23. Have definitely determined to leave and move on in a day or so. Wanless can spare enough supplies to fit me out again. I may even turn down river. The decision to go is a great relief, lifts a great weight from my mind. Yet I don't quite know why.

Wanless is busy in his lab or garden most of the day, but several times I noticed him walk back and disappear into the jungle behind the house. On these occasions Lucia always stands by the window without moving till he returns, stands staring at the dark wall of vegetation with the fear strong in her eyes and her face pale. Once I asked her:

"What do you fear, Lucia?"

"I fear the *thing, Senhor.*"

"What thing?"

"The *thing* in the hut, *Senhor,*" she replied, and refused to say more.

"The Devil's Breath?" I hazarded.

She threw me a frightened glance, but did not reply.

FEBRUARY 24. Wanless took me into his confidence tonight. He had been on the verge of telling me that first evening in the garden. Whether he held back because he was afraid I might be spying on him, or just what his reason was, I don't know. Probably it was only natural caution. At any rate, he told me all about it tonight as we sat in his laboratory. It was stifling hot, but the hordes of insects had driven us inside and we sat there in the little room with a single oil lamp for light and the long rows of bottles and jars looking down at us from the shadowy shelves.

Lucia sat unobtrusively on the floor in the corner. Now that I'm no longer a novelty she has abandoned the dress donned in my honor and reverted to her favorite household costume—a red waist-cloth and several strings of beads.

"Friend," Wanless started off with his usual form of address, "did you ever hear of the *Zoophyte giganticus wanlessi?*"

Lucia started suddenly and I heard her beads rattle, then she bent her head and began to play with an anklet.

"No," I replied, "I never did."

Wanless chuckled as at a huge joke.

"No, friend, not yet. The world does not yet know of my great work. You are the first I have told, and I only tell you because my work is almost completed. Tomorrow I will show you."

That is what he calls the thing: *Zoophyte giganticus.* Almost anyone scholarly enough to understand the implications of the name could understand from that what Wanless has been doing. For myself I became distinctly uncomfortable. Never have I liked taking liberties with nature. There was a long moment of silence, while Wanless leaned across the table with his eyes seeming to bulge more than ever behind his glasses. It was so still that I could hear Lucia's quick, nervous breathing, and a cougar crying somewhere far off in the jungle, and a rustling under the floor of the house where a pig was rooting in the refuse. After a minute Wanless went on:

"You are not a botanist, friend, but you know much of such matters and can understand what I am about to tell you. As you know, the animal kingdom is one form of life and that of the plants is another. Along dif-

ferent lines have they developed, but their basic principles are the same. And in the lower forms it is often difficult to tell them apart. There are plants which move about, and there are animals which are fixed in one place. There are plants which feed on bugs and insects, and there is an animal which contains chlorophyl. It is simply that these are two divergent lines of development. Do you see what I mean, friend?"

Of course I saw what he meant. I had not forgotten those perverted plants growing in the garden. Also, I began to understand something of Lucia's fear. But I only nodded.

"For years I have been doing this thing," Wanless continued, "doing it experimentally, here in my laboratory. Trying to cross an animal with a plant. Under those glass domes against the wall did I see my first zoophytes survive and grow. That was five years ago. Since then I have experimented with generation after generation of my plants. And I have succeeded, friend, I have succeeded! Out there, in a hut on the edge of the jungle, is a full-grown specimen of my giant animal-plant. Tomorrow I will show you."

When he finished I glanced at Lucia: the girl's face was positively haggard. She did not know much English, but she had understood enough to know what we were talking about. I have now this explanation of the latent terror that never leaves her eyes. Not that I feel any too comfortable myself. Somehow I don't think I shall sleep very well tonight.

FEBRUARY 25. Wanless was true to his word. This morning early we started off to a little clearing that lies about a quarter-mile back in the jungle. He explained that he had been afraid the natives might idly interfere with his experiments, but has found they never go near the place. I am not surprized. We perceived the odor known as the Devil's Breath before we had left the mud flats, and by the time we were within a hundred yards of the clearing the air was poisoned by the vilest, most horrible smell I have ever known.

In the center of the open space stood a hut about ten feet square. It is an ordinary thatch and mud cabin, but windowless and with a door supported on leathern hinges. Wanless tells me he built it alone and unassisted.

As we neared the place the stench became almost overpowering. God, that odor! Will I ever forget the taint of it? I can't compare it with any other; it beggars description. Primarily it's a stench of rottenness and decay, of putrefaction and death. The odor of long-dead carrion, the smell of a slaughter-house, the vile gasses of stagnant marshes, all are mild compared to what emanates from *that* unholy place. It was almost more than I could bear. Made the senses reel, and I think it could easily drive a man mad.

"Ah yes, the odor!" said Wanless with a chuckle when he saw me gasping. "It is unpleasant, no? But I have become used to it. Not that I enjoy, but I no longer notice."

"But what in God's name does it come from?" I asked him.

"From within the hut, friend. The zoophyte feeds entirely on carrion. Come."

He opened the door and we entered. Only half the hut was roofed over, the rest being open to the sun. The shadows in the covered part were deep and disturbing, but the other half was light enough.

Growing in the hut was—well, a plant. It can be called that for lack of a better name. The central mass was about eight feet high, grotesque, shapeless, and evil. It seemed tortured, distorted, and the many short, thick branches were twisted as though in pain. The thing looked as if its

first ancester had been a Venus fly-trap, one of those carnivorous flowers that feed on insects, but it was greatly changed. There was one central cavity, lined with stiff hairs to entrap anything within reach—a cavity of death with a ghastly, dead-white, silky lining, like the skin of a corpse. I can see it yet! Crimson and white and brown, with that silky cavity yawning below and the yellow pollen sticks above, it was like a figment of madness.

As I said, we entered the hut. And I swear to God that the damnable plant turned and *looked* at us! Looked isn't quite the word, for of course it has no eyes. Perceived is better. In some way it indefinably sensed our entrance and seemed to inspect us, and I felt the hair bristling all across my scalp.

I have heard before of giant plants of the fly-catcher species, but this is far worse. The thing has—well, it has personality. It is menacing. There was no breeze within the walls of that hut, yet the misshapen branches were continually in motion. The opening of the central cavity suddenly closed; it was like a huge, malevolent mouth.

On the floor of the hut was the vilest imaginable collection of rotting, loathsome carrion. Portions of the torn carcasses of various small animals lay about in all stages of decay. Around the foot of the *thing* these fragments formed a solid carpet of filth. The air was rank and foul, and a faint miasmatic mist seemed to be rising from that revolting mass of rotting flesh. The very sunlight that came through the hole in the roof was different and somehow unhealthy. This was the thing that for years had poisoned the wind behind Palaos, and had given rise to the legend of the Devil's Breath.

We stood there a while, Wanless beaming with a childlike pride and I simply staring. The thing has a ghastly fascination. Then one of the lower branches reached down, seized on half a young pig, and tossed it into the suddenly opened cavity. The jaws closed again with a snap, and I had seen enough. I turned and charged out of the hut, and Wanless followed more slowly.

Not till I was back on the river bank did I pause. The fever-filled air of this Orinoco jungle is like the breath of heaven after what I had just been breathing.

"What was it?" I asked when Wanless had caught up with me.

"My zoophyte, friend, my giant animal-plant. Born of my years of experiment, developed from a Venus fly-trap, and sired by half the animal kingdom!"

"But good God, man," I almost shouted at him, "why did you have to choose a plant of *that* sort to start with?"

"Because I wanted one as nearly animal at the beginning as I could get it. By that much did I make my task easier."

After we came back to the house Wanless gave me the details of his experiments. Some of them are pretty horrible. Most things sprout almost at once in this climate, and by intensive fertilization he has speeded up growth so that he has raised as many plant generations in the last five years as would normally grow in thirty or forty. Gradually he has trained the *thing* to feed on carrion. The rest of his methods are better forgotten; they are not pleasant.

As we came back I noticed that Lucia had, as usual, been keeping her vigil at the window.

FEBRUARY 26. By now I am thoroughly convinced that, like so many geniuses, Wanless is slightly mad. No ordinary man could have done what he has done. The most normal thing about him is his treatment of Lucia. It seems remarkable

that the cold-blooded sponsor of the zoophyte could be so kind and considerate toward a mixed-blood native girl. I believe that in his own queer way he really loves her.

Tomorrow I move on. Thank God for that!

MARCH 3. Move on? Not for a week yet—if then. The fever has me. An hour after I wrote the last entry above I was flat on my back with the local variety of malaria. And have been ever since.

Somehow I think the foul air I breathed in the hut of the zoophyte may have something to do with this. That may not be medically possible; I'm not much of a medico. Whatever the cause, here I am, and almost too weak even to write.

MARCH 5. A little better now. Lucia takes care of me, administering suitable doses of quinine and keeping me supplied with water from the big canvas cooler that always hangs from the porch roof. I've grown quite fond of the girl. She is a primitive creature in many ways, but she's kind-hearted and means well. She sits cross-legged on the floor beside my cot for hours, with a water jug between her knees and her eyes fixed on vacancy. Perhaps she thinks; perhaps not. One never knows.

MARCH 7. Am convalescing now. Wanless is seldom in evidence, but he did have a talk with me today and I learned the reason for his absence. He is quite jubilant.

"Progress, friend, progress!" he said, and beamed till his beard quivered. "I have again tried feeding my zoophyte on living flesh instead of on carrion. This time it is greatly a success—the plant becomes almost human. Now I range the jungle and trap small game for it. Soon it may hunt for itself—who knows? The roots are shallow, and it moves them. What do you think?"

I guess the fever must have soured me, for I snarled at him: "Since you ask me, I think you ought to let the damn thing starve to death."

"No, no, friend," he laughed; "to science it would be too great a loss. But you speak of hunger. Always is it hungry now; since it has tasted living flesh it will not touch carrion. And I can not seem to trap food fast enough. You should see how it snatches at anything I bring it! And it is strong, too; today I held out a stout stick I was carrying, and it snapped it like kindling. When you are well I will show you."

"Like hell you will!" I answered, and turned over to try to sleep. It seemed impossible to make the man angry.

MARCH 9. God! What a day of horror this has been! But to go back to the beginning:

I was quite a bit better this morning and sat propped up in a chair on the porch. Wanless had disappeared before I awoke, but Lucia was busy about the house. It struck me that she was even more silent than usual, and when she looked out the door for a minute I received a distinct shock. The girl was terrified! If ever I saw stark, primitive fear on a face it was then. I called to her, but she turned away without answering. The sense of menace that has been with me ever since I arrived in Palaos increased, and I grew restless and irritable.

It was sometime after noon that Lucia finally came out on the porch, walking with a slow, mechanical tread. There was an air of fatality about her, of resignation. In one hand she carried a chicken, its legs tied together with a cord.

"What is the trouble, Lucia?" I asked her in the bastard Portuguese she used.

"It is that I must go to the *thing* in the hut, *Senhor*," she told me, and I noticed that little beads of perspi-

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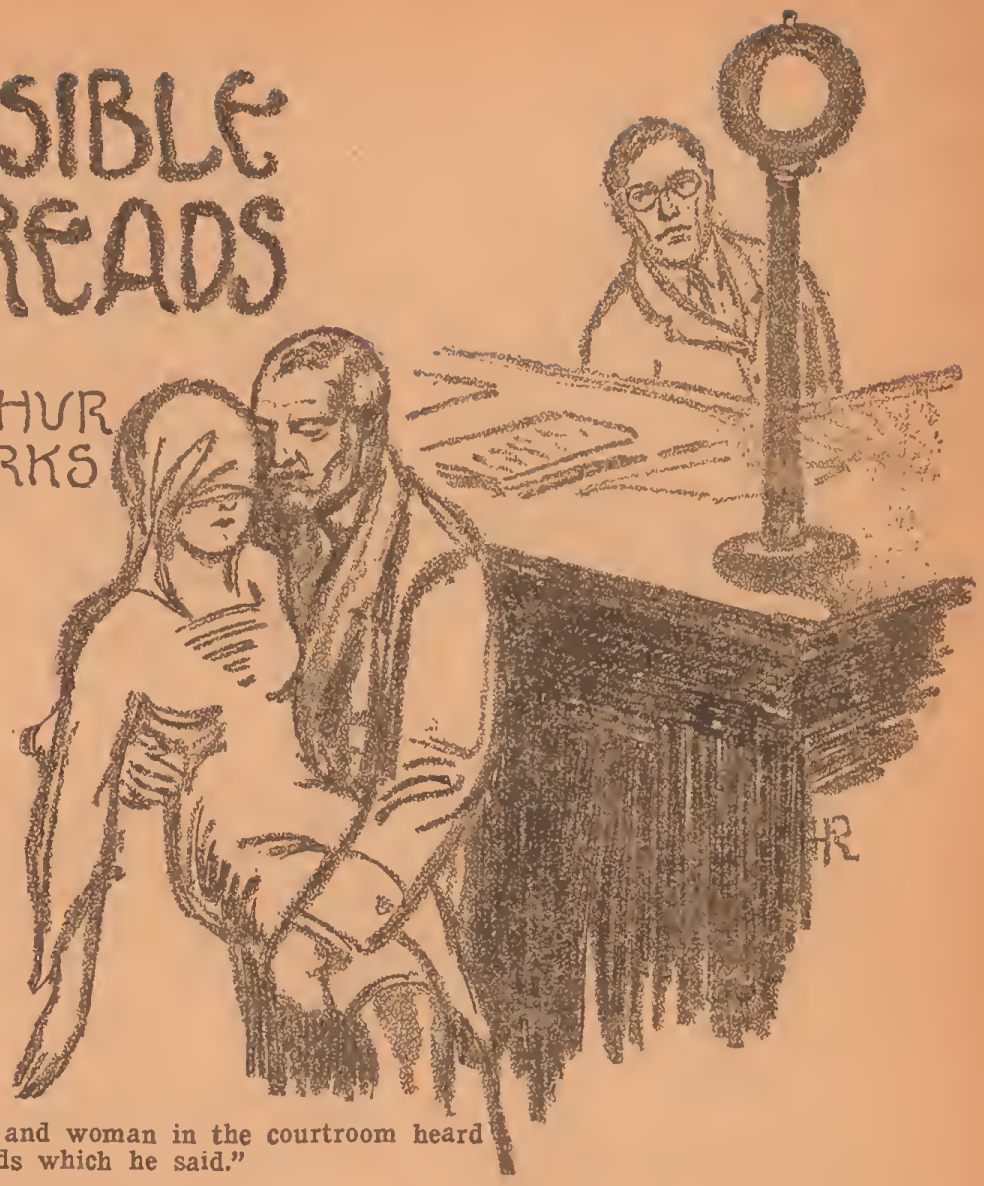
INVISIBLE THREADS

BY ARTHUR J. BURKS



"Every man and woman in the courtroom heard the few words which he said."

I WAS searching the want ad column of one of our greatest dailies, quite without purpose or method, except that I often saw insertions that were unique enough to catch my fancy, when I came across the advertisement that changed the whole course and tenor of my existence. I do not mention the city, for reasons that will be quite obvious as this tale unfolds. The advertisement read as follows:

HELP WANTED
MALE

Man of thirty who has never known fear and who has sufficient faith in himself to guarantee that he never shall know it, regardless of what may befall. Money no object. Address Box 137, THE STAR.

Here was something exactly to my liking. Money was no object with me either. I have more than I shall ever need. From my point of view the advertisement was extremely alluring. To one who, like myself, sees nothing but eternal night beyond the curtain, the desire to fill life with zest is ever present. The advertisement might be somebody's idea of a good practical joke, but a letter addressed to Box 137 would ascertain the truth. I, sitting in the lobby of my favorite hotel at the time, called a messenger boy and sent a brief note to Box 137, setting

forth my qualifications. I knew that I could look for an answer if the thing were not a joke of some kind. A sixth sense informed me, however, that I waited on the eve of some great and momentous happening; but whether this happening were by way of being a gigantic catastrophe, or the reverse, my sixth sense did not warn me.

Half an hour after the messenger boy left me, a note was pressed into my hand. I opened it and read:

You have been chosen by the owner of Box 137. Come.

This was followed by a street number which I may not name.

I entered a taxicab and hurried to a distant part of the city, had myself set down several blocks from the address given in the note, watched the taxicab out of sight, and then walked hurriedly toward my destination. I didn't know at the time why I took these precautions against being spied upon. But it seemed as though some inner voice directed my actions. I obeyed without question and without emotion. Fatalism again, if you will.

It was a very old dwelling, with twin windows looking out upon the street with the staring gaze of the totally blind. The place had a lifeless look and not a soul moved about the premises. It was a three-story building, made of red brick so stained by the rains and the winds of time that one could not be entirely sure of the original color. Sometime in the past there had been a lawn; but now the yard was naught but a bare splotch of unlovely ground, surrounded by an iron fence adorned with spikes at regular intervals—fence and spikes being stained with weird patches of rust that looked like dry blood.

I walked up the steps and raised my cane to rap against the panels of the scroll-worked door. There was neither knocker, bell, nor doorknob. Just as my cane would have touched the wood the door swung gently and smoothly open. I found myself face to face with a somnambulist. You regard this statement as startling, perhaps. It is true. The man before me, dressed neatly after the manner of the current mode for young men, did not know what was taking place. His eyes were wide open, set in an unblinking stare. There was no twitching of the lips, not the slightest quiver of the eyelids. The man looked at me and through me without being conscious of my presence. I had seen men in this state before and it caused me not a single tremor in this instance. I lighted a match and held the flame almost against the eyeball of the automaton. There was no sign whatever of reflex action. I pinched the man's arm, harshly; he made no sign. I lighted a cigarette as I studied the fellow, and as I did so I heard a metallic chuckle from somewhere in the darkness of the house's interior. There was a note of satisfaction in that chuckle. The voice seemed to come from above me and I knew that the invisible watcher stood at the top of some invisible stairway in the darkness ahead.

I looked once more at the automaton. His arm raised slowly, deliberately, and closed the door, shutting out the light of day. I waited, the tip of my cigarette the only bit of light in the intense gloom. I felt a hand touch and grip my arm above the elbow, and a barely perceptible pull indicated to me that I was to move straight ahead. A single intelligent entity in a well of gloom, an entity guided by a mechanical man, who was a man in all things except his brain—over which control was exercised by someone I had not yet seen. A queer situation, I suppose. A popular writer would tell of his sensations, no doubt—would make a comparison between the out-of-the-ordinary situation and the everyday sounds in the workaday streets outside. I refrain. What is, is. I accept that as sufficient.

THE grip on my arm was eloquent. I knew by its pressure just when to lift my feet to place them on the stairs. I began to ascend, my feet sinking deep in some soft material which covered the wood of the stairway. I came to a landing, turned to the right at the pressure of that hand. A pause after a time, a gash of light as a door was swung slowly open at the pressure of the automaton's free hand. I entered a room which was bathed in the light of day—a room which was furnished with lavish, if somewhat bizarre, taste. Deep rugs in the center, chairs covered with soft leather stained entirely black, chairs into which one sank deeply. A long room, this, with a ceiling so white that it glistened. On the right as I entered was a vast tapestry hanging that rustled gently with the slight draft from the open door—a gentle, billowing rustle that progressed along the entire right wall with the smooth motion of waves upon a shelving beach during a tropic night. The tapestry billowed inward far enough to tell me that there was no solid wall behind it, and that here was hidden a potential storehouse of mystery. And by mystery I mean mystery as you understand it, not as I accept it.

I brought my gaze to the man behind the desk. I was impressed first by the vast dome of the upper skull. The man was about fifty, wore a scraggly beard and dressed in black—like an executioner. The face, viewed from in front, gave him the appearance of a queer futuristic painting. He turned slightly aside as though he had read my thought, and the impression faded. The master of this house was a man of gigantic intellect; I knew that at once. Then he faced me again and, as his back was to the light which came in from the window, I could not continue my study of his psysiognomy at that moment. From the position he had taken I knew that his purpose was to study me and ascertain what sort of man he had chosen. The automaton stood at my left, motionless as a statue. I waited for the man who sat beyond the desk to speak, but he delayed so long that I looked back at the man beside me.

Had I been a man to be impressed by anything horrible then, I might have cried out. The automaton was staring unblinkingly at the man behind the desk, and for the first time I saw expression on his face. The face was the face of a brute without a soul—bestial, hellish—lips drawn tight in a snarl that showed white, set teeth. Here was a man capable of doing anything under the sun—but only if he who sat behind the desk willed it! For I saw at once that the brain behind that vast dome of a skull had written that expression on the face of the automaton. Hypnotism? No! Not as we know hypnotism today. Today hypnotism is the principal instrument of the charlatan and the faker. This was hypnotism such as the future may discover, wherein the hypnotist controls the very soul of the subject. What an instrument for evil in the hands of the wrong person! A hypnotist of today can not compel the subject to do something that is against the dictates of the subject's conscience. Yet this man with the domelike forehead could do it. He was the subject's conscience!

As I looked at the automaton the evil expression flitted away and was replaced by a smile so rare that I will treasure it always—a smile that showed the real man within the automaton. A lightning play of unseen forces, of unguessed-at power, had been shown me in the flash of an eyelid. The automaton bowed low to the man at the desk, faced about and vanished behind the billowing draperies.

The man at the desk spoke for the first time, in slow, measured tones that made me think of the getting under way of a powerful steam-roller.

"Very good, Mr. Abbott," he said, "you will be quite satisfactory."

I smiled acknowledgment and took the seat his extended hand indicated.

"You do not ask me how I know that you will do?"

It was a question.

"I know that I will do, and since you seem to know it there is understanding between us. So why question me?"

He was pleased with my answer.

"I should have known," he acknowledged, "but I must tell you who and what I am, and what you are to do. You are to be my secretary. You will see that the office is supplied with each and every newspaper written and published in this city. I say 'this city' for the present only, for, as I feel my way along, there will be a vast branching out that will include many other cities as time goes on. From these newspapers it will be your duty to clip, and file in chronological order, every story which records the doing of a wrong by one person against another. These stories you will refer to me in order whenever I tell you that I am ready for a new case."

"You are a detective?" I questioned, and could have bitten off my tongue the next instant. But he smiled.

"A detective? Well, yes, but a detective born generations before my time. My methods are the methods of the future. I am the pioneer in my field. I am the detective, the jury, and the judge who pronounces sentence. I punish the guilty according to my own code. I see that the feeble courts of today do not punish the innocent. I am the redresser of wrongs."

I know that such a speech sounds like the mouthings of a religious fanatic. But had you been facing the man who was speaking, as I faced him, you would have realized the gigantic intellect of him, and that he spoke the calm, unembellished truth. He continued:

"But there will be few words between us. As time goes on and we become thoroughly acquainted with each other there will be a thought communion that will almost obviate the necessity for words. I wish you to learn through observation, and I shall explain but little, as your groping steps lead you farther and farther into my words and my wishes, which will seem indeed a maze to you at first. Come, Abbott, we will begin."

He stood upright behind the desk for the first time and I saw that his mental stature was not the only big thing about him. His body was big, as though built to be a proper housing for the great mental engine which propelled it along. He stepped from behind the desk and advanced toward me. He placed a hand on my shoulder for a single instant, filling me in a twinkling with an impression of power far and away beyond the power of most men. Now, after a long time in his company, I believe that there are many great men; but of them all that he is the greatest.

HE PASSED me and I swung around to follow his movements, knowing that I was to follow his lead. With one big hand he grasped the billowy tapestry and swung it back like a curtain on a stage. And it was a stage, but such an one as I had never seen before in a rather varied life. The tapestry was naught but a partition in the center of a large room, and in this new partition of the room there was nothing to relieve the monotonous expanse of the dull red brick of which the house was built, except that swinging tapestry on the one side. The other three sides were without windows or doors, and when the curtain was drawn completely the only light that penetrated the artificial gloom was that which was reflected from the white ceiling and came in over the top of the undulating hanging. There was but one article of furniture in this dreary place—a single table of broad ex-

panse, its top some three feet from the level of the floor. The table was only out of the ordinary because of its great size.

There was nothing here to cause any undue palpitation of the heart or a single speeding of any one of the emotions.

Except the two dead men who lay flat on their backs, side by side, in the center of the huge table!

One of the men was the somnambulist who had conducted me into the presence of this man who called himself redresser of wrongs. The other I had never seen before. I looked at them closely, unwilling to admit that they were really dead, although I believe that any good physician would have pronounced them dead and gone away satisfied that he spoke the truth. They had every appearance which would uphold such a diagnosis. Yet the physician would have been wrong. In spite of the fact that the bodies of the two men were rigid and flexed to the point where they resembled reclining statues of marble; that there was not a single tremor of the chest walls, the abdomen, the delicate nostrils, or the eyelids; that not a murmur came to my sensitive ear as I placed it against first one chest and then against the other; in spite of all this I knew that both men lived.

"These are my agents," said Epiphané—such is the name he desired me to call him. "Through them I detect and punish."

That was all he would tell me at the time.

But he took a crumpled paper clipping from his pocket and handed it to me, swinging one massive leg over the edge of the table to support his weight as he did so. He gave no more attention to the two who lay there, dead yet strangely alive, than had they been, in truth, statues of cold and lifeless marble.

I took the clipping and read it hurriedly through. It was from a paper of this very morning and had left the press but an hour or so before my entrance into the house of Epiphané. The clipping was the newspaper story, minus the inch-high headlines which had marred the paper while intact, of a particularly atrocious murder among the upper strata of the city's aristocracy. Stated briefly, the account set forth the facts as follows: Coral Shuman, daughter of the city's greatest iron magnate, had been found dead at the point where the city drain empties into the river which carries away the waste of the great city. From somewhere in the city she had traveled through the slimy drain, to be vomited forth almost, but not quite, into the waters of the river itself. She had lodged against some sort of obstruction and the river patrol had found her. The fact that she had been murdered before being hurled into the drain was quite evident—the hilt and grip of a slender stiletto protruded from the flesh of her left breast. There were scratches on her face, too, but she might have received these on her journey through the drain. The paper stated that the house of Shuman had been robbed and, as nearly as Shuman himself could fix the time, this must have occurred almost simultaneously with the disappearance of the beautiful young heiress. When last seen by her parents she had been ascending to her own room, having pleaded a severe headache. The theory of the police was to the effect that the burglar had made a daylight entrance to the house and, finding the room of entry unexpectedly occupied, had murdered the girl to make good his escape.

Handing themselves the usual bouquet for astuteness, the police remarked, when interviewed by the reporter, that they knew at once that there was but one burglar in all the city's aristocracy of crooks who would have slain a woman to save his own hide from prison. Yes, sir, Dopey

Ellis was the man, without a doubt! They had picked him up within the hour and so shortly after the robbery that they had found upon his person every last bit of valuable stuff that had been taken from the house of Shuman. Topping all of this, Dopey Ellis had given a signed confession in which he swore to the killing of Coral Shuman! Stated, even boastfully, that he had done it with his own hands!

I looked a question at Epiphané when I had finished perusing the highly colored narrative.

"A closed case, you would say, eh, Abbott?" smiled Epiphané. "Dopey's confession would seem to settle everything."

I nodded. But I studied his face, marking again that dome of a brow, knowing that what he had to say next would be worth listening to.

"In spite of this," continued Epiphané, "Dopey Ellis did not kill Coral Shuman! He knows that his confession will do him no harm, for it just happens that life imprisonment is the punishment for murder in this state, and this appearance before a court of justice to answer for a major crime is one of a long series of such appearances for Dopey Ellis. Had Dopey made no confession whatever, he would still have gone to prison for life. This appearance ends the series, for because of it he will be declared an habitual criminal, which carries with it a sentence to state's prison for life. Dopey had nothing to lose by his confession and he may have believed that, in confessing, he covered some unknown brother of his own profession. Perhaps he did it because of an abnormal desire to make a fool of the city police. Perhaps he was worn out with the rigorous treatment accorded him by the famous Third Degree. In any case his confession, insofar as it relates to the killing of Coral Shuman, is absolutely false."

"But how will her real killer ever be apprehended, since the police will undoubtedly be satisfied with the signed confession of Dopey Ellis?"

"That is one of my duties as redresser of wrongs," replied Epiphané, "and these two marble statues are my avenging angels. Already I know who actually killed Coral Shuman. That is always the easiest step. The difficulty lies in bringing the culprit to justice. You understand, of course, that to accomplish the mission I have set for myself, I must never personally appear in a single case. The publicity would defeat my great purpose. Every bit of my work must be done by these two agents—a work so delicate that it needs the hand of a master craftsman, such as I hope some day to be. I am feeling my way."

I was running over, almost, with unasked questions. But I waited for Epiphané to go on.

"I do not wish to mystify you unduly," continued Epiphané, "but you and I will remain in this very room from this moment until the fulfilling of a certain prophecy I am about to make to you. You will satisfy yourself by observation that neither of these two agents is absent from this room for a single instant from now until the fulfilling of that prophecy. This is the prophecy: Cyril W. Shuman is the father of Coral, the dead heiress. He is also her murderer! Before noon tomorrow Cyril W. will have done one of two things—he will have gone to the police with the whole truth, sparing himself in nothing, or he will have died by his own hand, leaving a full confession behind him—a confession that will be borne out by the cold facts in the case. It will be my duty to bring this about. I do it with a clear conscience because I knew, fifteen minutes after this newspaper was being cried in the streets, that Cyril W. Shuman was the murderer of his own daughter!"

It is needless to tell of the hours of waiting. We brought chairs in from the room adjoining and settled ourselves to wait. Before the coming of darkness we talked languidly, about light topics which interested neither of us, but which helped to pass the time. When darkness came, however, Epiphané fell into a silence as deep as the silence of those two marble mummies on the table. I lighted cigarette after cigarette in order to keep awake and, as I drew the smoke into my lungs and the tip burned at intervals with a steady glow, I caught glimpses of the face of Epiphané, with the lofty brow above it. He sat motionless, staring, as devoid of expression as the two silent figures that lay as dead upon the table-top. Whither wandered that giant intellect of his? I might have been the only watcher over three who were dead. Perhaps you will agree with me that such a vigil is only for him who is without nerves. I experienced not a tremor of fear. My mind groped about so zealously for the answer to the riddle Epiphané had made for me that the hours passed swiftly and I had no desire to sleep. I was even surprized when the ceiling became lighter and lighter to my gaze until I knew that dawn was breaking over the city. I could finally make out, weirdly gray in the half-light, the set face of Epiphané, and the expressionless features of his two agents. Dawn broke fully at last and, as though at a signal, Epiphané straightened suddenly and rubbed his eyes.

"It is finished," said Epiphané quietly. "Cyril W. Shuman is dead by his own hand. His body is still twitching in his death throes as I speak."

Epiphané moved over and looked fixedly at the two figures on the table. His scrutiny lasted but a few seconds. The two men arose and stretched themselves as though they awakened from a sound sleep.

Epiphané introduced me to his colleagues with a gentle courtesy that was refreshing, to say the least, considering the night's vigil. They were Daniel Hoffman and Hans Dietz, young men of thirty or so, bright and wholly charming in demeanor. There was nothing whatever abnormal about them, but I had a feeling that I was in the presence of a trio that was bound together with invisible threads, a trinity with one mind and with one ideal—an ideal toward which they strove as one person, regarding obstacles only as stepping-stones to vaster knowledge. I don't know why I felt this, but the impression was there in that bare room, an aura that was almost tangible.

"We will wait for the papers," said Epiphané simply, "and now we must eat and, afterward, get a little sleep against the rigors of tonight."

The anticlimax! Why did these two, at any rate, require sleep when, to my certain knowledge, they had been deaf to the sounds of this world for more than twenty hours? But had they? I am glad now that I asked no foolish questions. In a third room the three fell to and prepared an excellent breakfast, after which all four of us threw ourselves, dressed as we were, on the four pallets which the room boasted, falling asleep at once, as falls the manual laborer who has worked to exhaustion. It was as prosaic as that. But I knew that we renewed ourselves for work such as the manual laborer never knows.

I awoke in the afternoon to see that Epiphané had arisen ahead of me. With a steaming cup of coffee on the arm of his chair, he was perusing the latest newspaper.

As I looked a question, he met my gaze, smiled slightly, and tossed the folded paper on the bed beside me. I opened it and scanned the headlines. They were two inches high and read as follows:

CYRIL W. SHUMAN A SUICIDE

CONFESSES MURDER OF DAUGHTER

I had expected this, eery and bizarre as had been the words of Epiphané, but even so, the bald headlines gave me a distinct thrill. I found time to thank my stars that my eyes had fallen upon the want ad of the owner of Box 137. But I read on, drinking in the words of Shuman's confession, which was reproduced word for word in the very center of the first page of *The Star*. The last three paragraphs gave me the greatest thrill. Below is the excerpt:

"I confess that I would have gone to my grave with sealed lips," said the confession, "had it not been for the strange visitation which I experienced during the night just passed. I went to bed late, as is my invariable habit, and fell asleep almost instantly. Almost at once I began to dream, a thing which never happens to me as my sleep is usually dreamless. It seemed that I was awake, yet even in this seeming wakefulness I knew that I dreamed. I lay and waited. I grew cold all over when the figure of a man came through the closed door of my bedroom, silently, without opening the door. Yet I swear he was not a ghost. He was too real. He advanced to my bedside, pointed a finger at me and said, 'Cyril W. Shuman, you are the murderer of your own daughter! I know this to be the exact truth and it is useless for you to deny it. To prove my knowledge I shall tell you exactly what took place.' The figure told me what did take place, and in a way that no other person could have known it save myself. I knew that my crime was known and that this figure, whatever it was, could prove the truth of what he said. 'Unless you make known the whole truth,' continued the figure in monotonous tones, 'a hint will be whispered into the ears of the police within the hour. The hint will be this: "Take a look at the accounts of Cyril W. Shuman in the case of Coral, his daughter, if you would find the motive for the murder!" Does that satisfy you that I know, Cyril W. Shuman?' I tried to speak the assent, but no sound came from my lips. Yet the figure inclined its head as though it heard the words I would have spoken. Then it nodded and disappeared backward through the closed door. Rather than face the disgrace I write this full and complete confession, after which I will take my own life! Kismet! It is written."

The confession must assuredly have been taken as the vaporings of a man subject to strange hallucinations, had it not been for the fact that a hurried audit of Shuman's accounts showed affairs to be in the exact muddle in which Shuman himself claimed them to be. He undoubtedly had motive enough for the slaying of his daughter, if one ever has motive for such a dastardly and unnatural crime. Two days more and Shuman would have been a bankrupt, a statement that is borne out by the cold facts in the case.

This was all of the newspaper story. But I told you that there were three paragraphs in the confession which captured my attention, yet I have reproduced but two of them above. It is a shabby kind of trick to hold the other in reserve for the climax, but I can not refrain.

For the third paragraph which so held my attention was a detailed description of the figure which Cyril W. Shuman had seen at his bedside. Shuman was a clever hand at written description. Yet even so, the dullest layman had but to look upon the counterpart of the description to recognize it at once. He would have known the figure as surely as though he had raised his eyes from the photographic reproduction to compare it with the original standing before his eyes.

It was a photograph in words of one of Epiphané's agents—the one who had ushered me into this very house but yesterday! I had but to compare it with the sleeping features of the man himself and—I knew!

Yet I had watched beside those marble figures during the entire night and not even a mouse could have left the place without my knowledge. Those marble figures had not moved until awakened by Epiphané. How had this strange retribution been accomplished?

2

MY CURIOSITY was overwhelming me and there was no one who could satisfy it except Epiphané him-

self. How had the thing been done? Had I slept—and had the agent gone out in the interim to thus interview Cyril W. Shuman? Had I myself been hypnotized while I sat in my chair during that night-long vigil? Had Epiphané really sent forth the soul—the essential entity—of one of his agents to accomplish this thing? If so, what had been the manner of its going? How had it communicated with the sleeping mind of the murderer? There had been two agents on that table. Shuman's confession spoke of but one. Where had the other been during the long period of time? Had I been witnessing something of vast importance? Or had I been taken in by the rigmarole of a professional mummer?

I looked at the faces of the two sleeping agents—faces of two young chaps that appeared extremely likable. I felt sure that neither would have lent himself to the chicanery of a crooked charlatan. Bootless speculation! For the fact remained that Shuman had confessed and that the visitation mentioned in his confession had been the direct cause of his killing himself. I looked up at the face of Epiphané, and I suppose that the muddle my mind was in showed plainly in my face. He was studying me intently when I lifted my head and met his gaze. He smiled and nodded his head. He held my eyes for a moment, hesitating. Then he jerked his head in the direction of the other rooms. He wished to talk without disturbing the sleepers.

He took his seat beyond the desk and I was facing him as I had done yesterday when I had first entered this strange place, only now he placed me on more of a basis of equality, for he motioned me to draw up a chair.

"What troubles you, Abbott?" he asked abruptly.

"Many things," I replied. "First, I am quite satisfied that you did not bring me here simply to take clippings from newspapers, a task that falls within the scope of a fifteen-dollar-a-week clerk. What do you want of me?"

"I wish you to take clippings for the present, just as I told you yesterday. It is only the beginning, but is a beginning that I regard as quite essential. I am taking you, step by step, into an undertaking that is new to the whole world. I am teaching you to walk, as it were. The little child does not walk before it has learned to stand upright."

"But may I ask questions?"

"Yes, and by your questions I shall know whether you are, in truth, the man I am seeking. I wish you to learn all that you may by observation and reflection, but I can understand that there might be questions, too."

"To begin at the beginning, then. You told me once that locating the guilty person in a crime is always the easiest step. I should think it would be the hardest. How do you do it?"

"I trace the impressions he leaves behind him at the scene of the crime."

"Impressions? You mean clues?"

"Not mere clues to a possible identity. No! These are often misleading and have sent many an innocent man to jail, even to death, because of their unreliability. I disregard these entirely, in favor of impressions that point the way with absolute certainty. I shall try to answer you by asking several other questions: What is electricity? No one really knows, yet everyone knows that it is. Why is it that the voice of a man who speaks into the instrument at a radio broadcasting station can be reproduced so that the listener thousands of miles away may understand, when there is not a wire connecting them? And is it any less wonderful if there is a wire connecting them, as in the telephone? But a few years ago the man who said that vocal impressions could be sent

over insensate metal and reproduced at a point miles away was regarded as a lunatic. But he was a prophet of keen discernment. Likewise the person who foresaw radio. Delicate instruments these, yet conceived by the nimble mind of man. There is no delicate instrument in existence that has not been conceived by the mind of man. There are persons who claim to have communicated with the departed. Without denying or asserting, I will call your attention to the fact that Edison, the greatest inventive genius of his time, tried to create an instrument that would communicate with the dead. He was not successful. What is the inescapable corollary to all this? That the mind of man is the most delicate instrument known to man. Mentality is the instrument by which I work."

"Hypnotism?"

"Call it that if you like. Let us dwell on the subject a moment. Writers on the subject have said that the mind of man is composed of two parts—the objective and subjective minds. The objective mind is the one in everyday use; we accept it without trying to explain. The subjective mind never sleeps, never forgets. It is the Alter Ego, the inner I. It is the instrument of the hypnotist. Master hypnotists say, with the best of reason, that the nearer the living subject approaches the condition of death, the more perfect becomes the action of the subjective mind, because the less is it hindered by the groping of the objective mind. These masters even go farther and say that, if the nearer the subject approaches the condition of death the more perfect becomes the action of the subjective mind, is it not correct to conclude that the subjective mind reaches perfection when the subject is actually dead? But they do not actually know this, for when the subject is dead the living mind of the hypnotist loses contact with the subjective mind of his subject. Rather involved, I admit, but true for all that."

"You are leading to one inescapable conclusion," I said, "a conclusion that I have always refused to accept—the existence of a soul."

"But surely you can not doubt the existence of a soul, Abbott. Especially since last night. If you refuse to accept the soul you refuse to accept the one essential fact that is the very foundation of my work."

"Figuratively and actually I am at your feet, Epiphané. Teach me!"

"Softly, softly, Abbott," replied Epiphané; "remember that the child must first stand upright."

"But," I went on, "if it were through the soul of young Dietz that you obtained the confession of Shuman, why is it that, though I watched the bodies of both your agents throughout the night, I saw not a sign, not a motion? Is the soul visible under certain conditions? Why did I not see some manifestations? A spiraling column of mist rising from the mouth of the subject, to assume the wraithlike form of the man? The divine entity rising from the recumbent form while the recumbent form remains motionless, as though it were the soul's cast-off clothing?"

"Trappings of the charlatan and faker!" retorted Epiphané. "You have been reading trash, Abbott."

"Then," I retorted triumphantly, "how do you explain that part of Shuman's confession in which he describes the appearance of Dietz with a clarity that is almost photographic? A perfect description of a man he has never seen!"

"Ah, I expected that question," said Epiphané softly. "Let me point out a few words in that same confession to which you so triumphantly allude."

HE SPREAD out the newspaper, which he had brought with him, as though he had, indeed, foreseen my question.

"Note what he says here:

It seemed that I was awake, yet even in this seeming wakefulness, I knew that I dreamed!

"What do you make of that, Abbott?"

I sought for an answer and found none. He had turned my own weapon against me.

"There is yet another question," I said, after a long pause. "Apparently you used but one of your agents last night, for the confession of Shuman describes but one figure. Where was Hoffman? Why was he kept beside Dietz upon the table in this other room?"

"The explanation is simple. Had I had more agents they would all have been there and in the same condition. Since I am but beginning my work I have but two agents as yet. Hoffman was upon another mission."

"But you controlled them both," I cried. "Why is there any necessity for the use of subjects? Since your mind is the central control, why do you not do it all yourself?"

"Ah, Abbott, the mind of man is a great and delicate instrument, but it still must work within certain limitations. The research of the future may change this, but the time has not yet come. I send one man forth, with mental directions, which he carries out because he has been well chosen for his work. This leaves me free to send out the other—others if I had them. I am the central control—the mental switchboard, if you please—joined to my subjects by invisible threads. Impossible? Is the radio impossible? Who shall say that anything is impossible?"

"In the past," I went on, "as justice perfected its machinery for bringing wrongdoers to justice, the wrongdoers have themselves progressed. Were instruments created to prove certain essential elements of crime, master criminals perfected methods that baffled these instruments. It has been a sort of endless chain proposition. The right chasing the wrong, the wrong chasing the right—the age-old combat. Do you think that the master criminal may not be born who will use your very own weapons?"

"God forbid!" cried Epiphané. "What might not such a one accomplish with such instruments and the knowledge to use them!"

"Then," I said, "you are placing untold confidence in me, a stranger!"

"But you are not master of the weapons yet, Abbott—nor will you be until I know you beyond all shadow of doubt. I am in your power now to the extent that you know that my brain controls all that is known of what I may call a new science. You have but to smash the switchboard."

"Could these other two, Hoffman and Dietz, carry on without you?"

"No. They could not go on, though were I destroyed, they could take their places in the world with all the normal advantages of other young men of their own ages. Oh, I have mastered my weapons, Abbott! Destroy me and the world remains the same as before. Leave the switchboard intact and the world is richer by one unknown benefactor."

Epiphané arose, signifying that he had said all that he would at this time, regarding the working of his great scheme.

"A step at a time, Abbott," he concluded. "Tomorrow you will be wiser than now. Another step will be behind you."

"One more question," I entreated. "Do your agents remember, after they awaken, their experiences?"

"Only when I will it," replied Epiphané; "otherwise they recall nothing. I am the switchboard, remember, and awakening breaks the contact."

We returned to the room which housed the two sleepers. They had awakened now and were talking in an animated manner, discussing various topics of the day with the same

aplomb with which young men discuss these nothings wherever modern young men are encountered. As Epiphané entered the room there was a curious tension for a brief moment, as they looked at him in a questioning manner. He paid them no heed, yet as though some message had passed from him to them, a sort of signal perhaps, they continued their conversation as though nothing had happened.

I returned to sit upon my pallet while Epiphané resumed his perusal of the newspaper. Leisurely he turned the wide leaves, methodically folding the paper back upon itself. I watched him and saw his eyes light up with interest as a headline captured his attention. Then he sprang up, with the story half read.

"Quick, Hoffman!" he cried. "Into the other room! The final hearing on the Goetsche divorce case comes up at 5 o'clock this evening, a late session of court purchased by the power of Goetsche's millions! Come in with us a moment, Abbott, after which I have some instructions to give you."

WE THREE entered that room with the billowy draperies and Hoffman took his place on the table.

As Epiphané bent over him I tried to recall all I could of this great divorce case which had scandalized the entire world of fashion. It had started first as a simple divorce case, but as the machinery of the law went against Goetsche he threw every last ounce of his power into the balance. He had charged his wife with infidelity, and had produced witness after witness to prove his charges. There were choice bits of scandal paraded in public court by witnesses from every walk of life. Detectives had been hidden in dressing-room closets at the Goetsche home; maids had listened at convenient keyholes; Goetsche himself had returned home unexpectedly on several occasions—so he said. There were so many of these witnesses that reporters had been heard to remark that Goetsche must have stationed detectives and waiting maids in every dark corner of his home. The weight of evidence was certainly on the side of Goetsche—the millionaire who was twice as old as his beautiful and talented wife. The defense had tried to prove that these witnesses had been purchased by the buying power of Goetsche's money, but the attempt had been so far unsuccessful. The prosecution had even found a doctor who claimed to have been present when a baby, whose fatherhood had been brought in question, had been born to Mrs. Goetsche. This doctor violated all the ethics of his profession by divulging a confession, a confession both pungent and to the point, which Mrs. Goetsche had made to him under the veil of his professional secrecy. As this doctor stood high in his profession, with a yearly income that ran well into six figures, a mighty compelling force must have been brought into play to cause him to tear aside the veil of professional secrecy—an act that must certainly bring down upon his head the wrath of his colleagues throughout the medical world, certain ruination for him as far as his profession was concerned. His evidence thus given had been damning in the extreme. Since his testimony had been given Mrs. Goetsche had habitually worn a thick veil while in the courtroom or in public, hiding her lovely face from the lecherous eyes of the public.

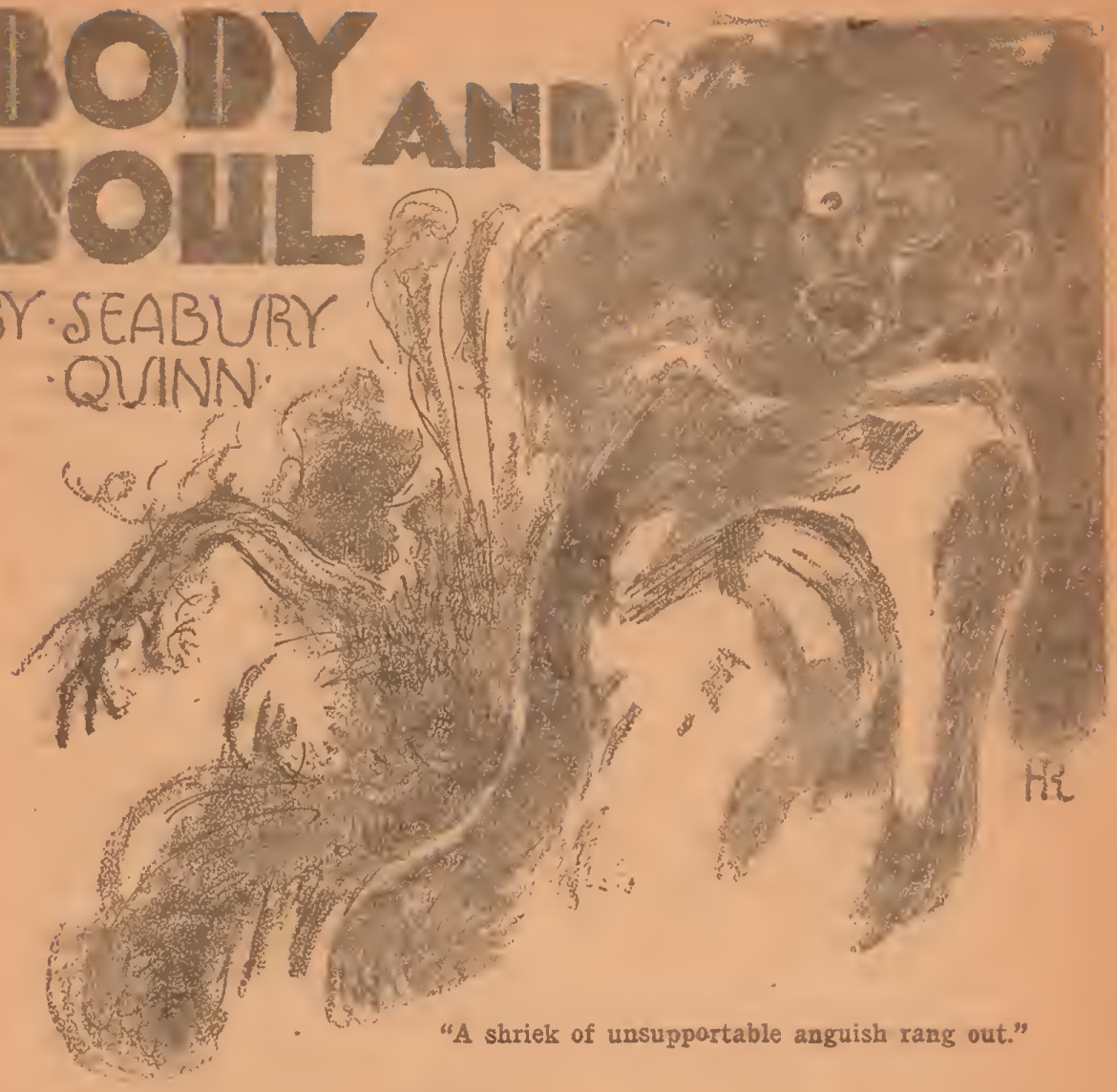
Hoffman now lay like a dead person on the table. Epiphané turned to me.

"This is the work upon which Hoffman was engaged yesterday and last night," he said. "You have doubtless read of this scandalous case—everyone has. Goetsche desires another woman—a woman who refuses her love without marriage. There-

(Continued on page 423)

BODY AND SOUL

BY SEABURY QUINN



"A shriek of unsupportable anguish rang out."

I HAD had a strenuous day, for the mild epidemic of summer grippe had lasted over into September, and my round of calls had been double the usual number. "Thank heaven, I can relax for seven or eight hours," I murmured piously as I pulled the single blanket up around my chin and settled myself for the night. The hall clock had just struck 12, and I had no appointments earlier than 9 the following morning. "If only nobody is so inconsiderate as to break a leg or get the bellyache," I mumbled drowsily, "I'll not stir from this bed until——"

As if to demonstrate the futility of self-congratulation, there came a sudden thunderous clamor at the front door. Someone was beating the panels with both his fists, raining frenzied blows on the wood with his feet and shrieking at the top of his voice, "Let me in! Doctor—Dr. Trowbridge, let me in! For God's sake, let me in!"

"The devil!" I ejaculated, rising resentfully and feeling for my slippers and dressing-gown. "Couldn't he have had the decency to ring the bell?"

"Let me in, let me in, Dr. Trowbridge!" the frantic hail came again as I rounded the bend of the stairs. "Let me in—quick!"

"All right, all right!" I counseled testily, undoing the lock and chain-fastener. "Just a min——"

The caller ceased his battering-ram assault on the door as I swung it back and catapulted past me into the hall, almost carrying me off my feet as he did so. "Quick, shut it—shut the door!" he gasped, wheeling in his tracks to snatch the knob from my hand and force the door to. "It's out there—it's outside there, I tell you!"

"What the mischief——" I began, half puzzled, half angry, as I took quick stock of the intruder.

He was a young man, twenty-five or -six, I judged, dressed somewhat foppishly in a suit of mohair dinner clothes, his jacket and waistcoat badly rumpled, his once stiff evening shirt and collar reduced to a pulpy mass of sweat-soaked linen, and the foamy froth of drool disfiguring the corners of his flaccid mouth. As he turned on me to repeat his hysterical warning, I noticed that he caught his breath with considerable difficulty and that there was a strong hint of liquor in his speech.

"See here, young man, what do you mean?" I demanded sternly. "Haven't you any better sense than to knock a man out of bed at this ungodly hour to tell him that——"

"Ssssh!" he interrupted with the exaggerated caution of the half-tipsy. "Ssssh, Dr. Trowbridge, I think I hear it coming up the steps. Is the door locked? Quick, in here!" Snatching me by the arm he dragged me unceremoniously into the surgery.

"Now see here, confound you!" I remonstrated. "This is going a bit too far. If you expect to get away with this sort of thing, I'll mighty soon show you——"

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* what is it? What does the alarm portend?" Jules de Grandin, a delicate mauve-silk dressing-gown drawn over his lilac pajamas, slippers of violet snakeskin on his womanishly small feet, tiptoed into the room, his little blue eyes round with wonder and curiosity. "I thought I heard someone in extremity calling," he continued, looking from the visitor to me, then back again with his quick, stock-taking glance. "Is it that someone dies and requires our assistance through the door to the better world, or——"

"It looks as if some drunken young fool is trying to play a practical joke on us," I returned grimly, bending a stern look on the boy who cowered in the chair beside my desk. "I've half a mind to prescribe four ounces of castor oil and stand by while he takes it!"

De Grandin regarded the young man with his steady, unwinking stare a moment, then: "What frightens you, *mon brave?*" he demanded, far too gently, I thought. "*Parbleu,* but you look as though you had been playing tag with Satan himself!"

"I have—I have!" the youth replied quaveringly. "I tell you, it jumped at me just as I came past the park entrance, and I wasn't a hundred yards ahead when Dr. Trowbridge let me in!"

"U'm?" the Frenchman twisted the ends of his little blond mustache meditatively. "And this 'It' which pursued you, it is what?"

"I don't know," the other responded. "I was walking home from a dance at the Sigma Delta Tau house—been stagging it, you know—and stopped by the Victory Monument to light a cigarette when something—dam' if I know what—jumped out o' the bushes at me and made a grab at my throat. It missed my neck by a couple o' inches, but snatched my hat, and I didn't take any time to see what it would do next. I'd 'a' been going yet if my wind hadn't given out, and I happened to think that Dr. Trowbridge lives in this block and that he'd most likely be up, or within call, anyhow, so I rushed up the steps and hammered on the door till he let me in.

"Will you let me stay here overnight?" he concluded, turning to me appealingly. "I'm Dick Ratliff—

Henry Ratliff's nephew, you know—and honest, Doctor, I'm scared stiff to go out in that street again till daylight."

"H'm," I murmured judicially, surveying the young fool reflectively. He was not a bad-looking boy—quite otherwise—and I could well imagine he presented a personable enough appearance when his clothing was in better array and his head less fuddled with bad liquor. "How much have you had to drink tonight, young man?"

"Two drinks, sir," he returned promptly, looking me squarely in the eye, and, though my better judgment told me he was lying like a witness at a Senate investigation, I believed him.

"I think you're a damn fool," I told him with more candor than courtesy. "You were probably so full of rotgut that your own shadow gave you a start back there by the park gate, and you've been trying to outrace it for the last four blocks. You'll be heartily ashamed of yourself in the morning, but I've a spare bed, and you may as well sleep off your debauch here as in some police station, I suppose."

"Thank you, sir," he answered humbly. "I don't blame you for thinking I've got the jimjams—I know my story sounds crazy—but I'm telling you the truth. Something did jump out at me, and almost succeeded in grabbing me by the throat. It wasn't just imagination, and it wasn't booze, either, but—my God, *look!*"

THE exclamation ended in a shrill crescendo, and the lad half leaped from his chair, pointing with a shaking forefinger at the little window over the examination table, then slumped back as though black-jacked, his hands falling limply to the floor, his head lolling drunkenly forward on his breast.

Both de Grandin and I wheeled about, facing the window. "Good lord!" I exclaimed as my gaze penetrated the shining, night-backed panes.

"*Grand Dieu—ç'est le diable en personne!*" the little Frenchman cried.

Staring into the dimly lighted room was such a visage as might bring shudders of horripilation to a bronze statue. It was a long, cadaverous face, black with the dusky hue of old and poorly cured rawhide, bony as a death's-head, yet covered with a multitude of tiny horizontal wrinkles. The fleshless, leathery lips were drawn back from a set of broken and discolored teeth which reminded me somehow of the cruel dentition of a shark, and the corded, rugous neck supporting the withered face was scarcely thicker than a man's wrist. From the bare, black scalp there hung a single lock of coarse, straggling hair. But terrible as the features were, terrifying as were the unfleshed lips and cheeks and brow, the tiny, deep-set eyes almost fallen backward from their sockets were even more horrible. Small as the eyes of a rodent, set, unwavering in their stare, they reminded me, as they gleamed with hellish malevolence in their settings of shrunken, wrinkled skin, of twin poisonous spiders awaiting the chance to pounce upon their prey. It might have been a trick of the lamplight, but to me it seemed that the organs shone with a diabolical luminance of their own as they regarded us with a sort of mirthless smile.

"Good heavens, what is it?" I choked, half turning to my companion, yet keeping most of my glance fixed on the baneful, hypnotic orbs glaring at me through the windowpane.

"God knows," returned de Grandin, "but by the belly of Jonah's whale, we shall see if he be proof against shot and powder!" Whipping a tiny Ortgies automatic from his dressing-gown pocket he brought its blunt muzzle in line with the win-

dow and pressed the trigger. Seven, eight shots rang out so quickly that the last seemed no more than the echo of the first; the plate glass pane was perforated like a sieve within an area of three square inches; and the sharp, acrid smell of smokeless powder bit the mucous membrane of my nostrils.

"After him, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin cried, flinging aside the empty pistol and bolting through the door, down the hallway and across the porch. "*Barbe d'une oie*, but we shall see how he liked the pills I dealt him!"

The September moon rode serenely in the dark-blue sky; a little vagrant breeze, coming from the bay, rustled the boughs of the curbside maple trees; and from the downtown section there came to us, faintly, the muted clangor of the all-night trolley cars and the occasional hoot of a cruising taxicab's horn. After the bedlam of the Frenchman's shots the early autumn night seemed possessed of a stillness which bore in on our eardrums like a tangible sound, and, like visitors in an empty church, we pursued our quest in silence, communicating only in low, breathless whispers. From house to hedge, over lawn and rosebed and tennis court we pushed our search, scanning every square inch of land, peering under rosebushes and rhododendron plants, even turning over the galvanized iron trash-can which stood by my kitchen stoop. No covert large enough to have shielded a rat did we leave unexplored, yet of the awful thing which had gazed through the surgery window we found no sign or trace, though we hunted till the eastern sky began to pale with streaks of rose and pearl and amethyst and the rattling milk carts broke the nighttime quiet with their early-morning clatter.

"Good mornin', Dr. de Grandin." Detective Sergeant Costello rose from his seat in the consulting-room as de Grandin and I entered. "'Tis sorry I am to be disturbin' ye so early in th' mornin', more especially as I know what store ye set by yer breakfast"—he grinned broadly at his sally—"but th' fact is, sor, there's been a tidy little murder committed up th' street, an' I'm wondering if ye'd be discommodin' yerself to th' extent o' comin' up to Professor Kolisko's house and takin' a look around before th' coroner's physician messes everything up an' carts th' remains off to the morgue for an autopsy."

"A murder?" de Grandin's little eyes snapped with sudden excitement. "Do you say a murder? My friend, you delight me!"

"Yes, sor, I knew y'd be pleased to hear about it," the Irishman answered soberly. "Will we be goin' up to th' house at once, sor?"

"But of course, by all means," de Grandin assented. "Trowbridge, my friend, you will have the charity to convey us thither, will you not? Come, let us hasten to this Monsieur Kolisko's house and observe what we can see. And"—his little eyes twinkled as he spoke—"I beseech you, implore the so excellent Nora to reserve sufficient breakfast against the time of our return. *Mordieu*, already I feel my appetite assuming giant proportions!"

Two minutes later the detective, de Grandin and I were speeding uptown toward the isolated cottage where Urban Kolisko, one-time professor of psychology at the University at Warsaw, had passed the declining years of his life as a political refugee.

"Tell me, Friend Costello," the Frenchman demanded; "this Monsieur Kolisko, how did he die?"

"H'm, that's just what's puzzlin' all of us," the detective admitted. "All we know about th' case is that Murphy, who has th' beat where th' old felly lived, wuz passin' by there a little after midnight an' heard th' devil's own row goin' on inside. Th'

lights wuz all goin' in th' lower part o' th' house, which warn't natural, an' when Murphy stopped to hear what it wuz all about, he thought he heard someone shoutin' an' swearin', an' once or twice th' crack o' a whip, then nothin' at all.

"Murphy's a good lad, sor; I've knowed him, man an' boy, these last eighteen years, an' he did just what I'd expected o' him. Went up an' knocked on th' door, an' when he couldn't get no response, broke it in. There was hell broke loose for certain, sor."

"Ah?" returned de Grandin. "What did the excellent Murphy observe?"

"Plenty," Costello replied laeonically. "Ye'll be seein' it for yerself in a minute."

Inside the Kolisko house was that peculiar hush which does reverenee to the Grim Reaper's visits. Acting on telephoned instructions, Officer Murphy mounted guard before the door, permitting no one to enter the place, and the scene in the small, poorly lighted living-room was exactly as he had come upon it several hours earlier.

Like most dyed-in-the-wool students, Kolisko had regarded his home merely as a place to sleep, eat and store books. The room was lined from floor to ceiling on all sides with rough deal shelving which groaned and sagged under the weight of ponderous volumes in every language known to print. Piles of other books, unable to find accommodation on the shelves, were littered about the floor. The rough, benchlike table and the littered, untidy desk which stood between the two small windows were also piled high with books.

Between the desk and table, flat on its back, staring endlessly at the rough whitewashed ceiling with bulging, sightless eyes, lay the relic of Professor Kolisko. Clothed in a tattered bathrobe and soiled pajamas the body lay, and it was not a pretty sight even to a medical man to whom death in its unloveliest phases is no stranger. Kolisko had been thin to the point of emaciation, and his scrawniness was accentuated in death. His white-thatched head was thrown back and bent grotesquely to one side, his straggling white beard thrust upward truculently, and his lower jaw had fallen downward with the flaccidity of death, half an inch or so of tongue protruding beyond the line of his lower teeth. Any doctor, soldier or undertaker—any man whose business has to do habitually with death—could not fail to recognize the signs. The man was dead, and had been so for upward of seven hours.

"Howly Mither!" Costello's brogue came strongly to the surface as he blessed himself involuntarily. "Will ye be lookin' at th' awfulness o' him, sors?"

"U'm," murmured Jules de Grandin, sinking to one knee beside the corpse, raising the lolling head and fingering the back of the neck with quick, practised hands, then brushing back the bristling beard to examine the scrawny throat attentively, "he had cause to be dead, this one. See, Friend Trowbridge"—taking my hand he guided my fingers slowly down the dead man's neck, then pointed to the throat—"there is a clean fracture of the spine between the third and fourth dorsal vertebræ, probably involving a rupture of the eord, as well. The autopsy will disclose that. And here"—he tapped the throat with a well-manicured forefinger—"are the marks of strangulation. *Mordieu,* whatever gripped this poor one's neck possessed a hold like Death himself, for he not only choked him, but broke his spine as well! If it were not for one thing, I should say such strength—such ferocity of grip—could only have been

exerted by one of the great apes, but——''

He broke off, staring with preoccupied, unseeing eyes at the farther wall.

''But what, sor?'' Costello prompted as the little man's silence continued.

''*Parbleu*, it could not be an ape and leave such a thumb-mark, my friends,'' de Grandin returned. ''The gorilla, the orang-utan, the chimpanzee, all have such strength of hand as to accomplish what we see here, but they are not human, no matter how much they parody mankind. Their thumbs are undeveloped; the thumb which closed on this one's neck was long and thin, more like a finger than a thumb. See for yourselves, it closed about the throat, meeting the fingers which clasped it on the other side. *Mordieu*, if we are to find this murderer we must look for one with twice the length and five times the strength of hand of the average man. Bethink you—this one's grip was great enough to snap Kolisko's spine like a clay-pipe stem by merely squeezing his neck! *Dieu de Dieu*, but he will be an uncomfortable one to meet in the dark!''

''Sergeant Costello,'' Murphy's hail came sharply from the cottage door, ''they're comin'; Coroner Martin an' Dr. Schuester just drove up!''

''All right, Murphy, good lad!'' Costello returned, then glanced sharply at de Grandin. ''Leave him be, Doc,'' he ordered. ''If th' coroner an' Dr. Schuester catch us monkeyin' with their property there'll be hell poppin' at headquarters.''

''Very good, my friend,'' de Grandin rejoined, rising and brushing the dust from his trousers knees, ''we have seen as much of the body as we desire. Let them have it and perform their gruesome rites; we shall look elsewhere for what we seek.''

Coroner Martin and his physician came bustling in almost as the little Frenchman ceased speaking, glanced casually at Costello and suspiciously at de Grandin and me, then went at their official duties with only a mumbled word of greeting.

''What do you make of it?'' I inquired as we drove toward my house.

''*Eh bien*, as yet I make nothing,'' de Grandin returned. ''The man was killed by paralysis resulting from a broken neck, although the pressure on his windpipe would have been sufficient to have slain him, had it but continued long enough. We know his murderer possessed hands of extraordinary strength and size, and is, therefore, in all probability, a man of more than usual height. Thus far we step with assurance. When the coroner has finished with the deceased gentleman's premises, we shall afford ourselves the pleasure of a protracted search; before that we shall request our good friend Costello to inquire into Monsieur Kolisko's antecedents and discover if he possessed any enemies, especially any enemies capable of doing him to death in this manner. Meantime I famish for my breakfast. I am hungry as a cormorant.''

The boasted appetite was no mere figure of speech. Three bowls of steaming cereal, two generous helpings of bacon and eggs, half a dozen cups of well-creamed coffee disappeared into his interior before he pushed back his chair and lighted a rank-smelling French cigarette with a sigh of utter content. ''*Eh bien*, but it is difficult to think on an empty stomach,'' he assured me as he blew a column of smoke toward the ceiling. ''Me, I am far from my best when there is nothing but flatulence beneath my belt. I require stimu—— *Mon Dieu*, what a fool I am!''

Striking his forehead with the heel of his hand, he rose so abruptly that

his chair almost capsized behind him.

"What's the matter?" I asked, but he waved my question and me aside with an impatient hand.

"*Non, non,* do not stop me, do not hinder me, my friend!" he ordered. "Me, I have important duties to perform, if it be not too late to do them. Go upon your errands of mercy, Friend Trowbridge, and should you chance to return before I quit the surgery, I pray you leave me undisturbed. I have to do that which is needful, and I must do it uninterrupted, if you please."

Having thus served notice on me that I would be unwelcome in my own workshop, he turned and fled toward the front door like a luckless debtor pursued by collectors.

It was nearly 4 o'clock that afternoon when I returned from my round of calls and tiptoed past the surgery door, only to find my caution unnecessary, for de Grandin sat in the cool, darkened library, smoking a cigar and chuckling over some inane story in *L'Illustration.*

"Finish the important duties?" I asked, regarding him ironically.

"But certainly," he returned. "First, dear friend, I must apologize most humbly for my so abominable rudeness of this morning. It is ever my misfortune, I fear, to show only incivility to those who most deserve my courtesy, but I was all afire with the necessity of haste when I spoke. Great empty-head that I was, I had completely forgotten for the moment that one of the best places to seek clues of a murder is the person of the victim himself, and when I did remember I was almost beside myself until I ascertained to which *entrepreneur des pompes funèbres*—how do you say it? undertaker?—my God, what a language!—Monsieur Kolisko's body had been entrusted by the coroner. Friend Costello informed me that Monsieur Mitchell was in charge, and to the excellent Mitchell I hurried post-haste, begging that he would permit me one little minute alone with the deceased before he commenced his ministrations.

"H'm, and did you find anything?" I asked.

"*Parbleu,* yes; I found almost too much. From the nails of Monsieur Kolisko's hands I rescued some fragments, and in your surgery I subjected them to microscopic examination. They proved to be—what do you say?"

"Tobacco?" I hazarded.

"Tobacco!" he scoffed. "Friend Trowbridge, sometimes I think you foolish; at others I fear you are merely stupid. Beneath the dead man's finger-nails I found some bits of human skin—and a fragment of human hair."

"Well," I returned unenthusiastically, "what of it? Kolisko was an exceedingly untidy sort of person—the kind who cared so little for social amenities that he was apt to scratch himself vigorously when he chose, and probably he was also addicted to the habit of scrabbling through his beard with his fingers. Most of those European scientists with birds' nests sprouting from their chins are that sort, you know. He was shockingly uncouth, and——"

"And you annoy me most thoroughly, Friend Trowbridge," the little Frenchman broke in. "Listen, attend me, regard that which I am about to tell you: The skin and hair which I did find were black, my friend, black as bitumen, and subjected to chemical reagents, showed themselves to be strongly impregnated with natron, oil of cedar and myrrh. What have you to say now?"

"Why——"

"And if these things suggest an Egyptian mummy to you, as they may if you think steadily for the next ten or more years, I make so bold as to ask what would a professor of psy-

chology be doing in contact with a mummy. *Hein?* Answer me that, if you please. Had he been an Egyptologist, or even a student of comparative anatomy, there would be reason for it, but a psychologist—it does not make sense!''

''Well, then, why bother about it?'' I retorted.

''Ah, but I think maybe, perhaps, there is an answer to the riddle, after all,'' he insisted. ''Recall the events of last night, if you please. Remember how that young Monsieur Ratliff came bawling like a frightened calf to our door, begging to be taken in and protected from something which assaulted him in the public thoroughfares. Recollect how we suspected him of an overindulgence in alcohol, and how, as we were about to turn him out, there appeared at our window a most unpleasant-looking thing which made mock of Jules de Grandin's marksmanship. *Parbleu,* yes, you will recall all that, as well as that the ungrateful Ratliff child did sneak away from the house without so much as saying 'thank you' for our hospitality while we were out with Sergeant Costello viewing Monsieur Kolisko's remains.''

''Then you'd suggest——'' I began incredulously, but he rose with an impatient shrug.

''Ah bah, I think nothing, my friend,'' he assured me. ''He who thinks without knowing is a fool. A connection there may be between that which we saw last night and that which we viewed this morning. We shall see, perhaps. I have an engagement to search Kolisko's house with Sergeant Costello this evening, and I suggest you accompany us. There may be that there which shall cause your eyes to pop from out your face with wonder. Meantime, I hear visitors in the reception-room. Go to your duties, my friend. Some neurotic old lady undoubtlessly desires you to sympathize with her latest symptoms.''

''Well, sor,'' confided Sergeant Costello as he, de Grandin and I set out for the Kolisko cottage that evening, ''this case beats th' Jews, an' th' Jews beat the devil.''

''Indeed?'' responded de Grandin politely.

''It sure does. We've been over Kolisko's antecedents, as ye might call 'em, an' th' devil a thing can we find that might lead us to a clue as to who killed him. 'Twas little enough they knew about him, at best, for he was a stand-offish old felly, wid never a word for annybody, except when he wanted sumpin, which warn't often. He had a few Polack cronies, but they wuz few an' far between. Five months ago a felly broke into his house an' stole some stuff o' triflin' value, an' shot up a State trooper while tryin' to escape to th' next town. Kolisko appeared agin 'im at th' trial, as wuz his dooty, for he wuz subpenaed, an' later visited 'im in jail, I understand, but this felly—name o' Heschler, he wuz—didn't take anny too kindly to th' professor's visits, an' he cut 'em out.''

''Ah,'' de Grandin nursed his narrow chin in the cradle of his hand, ''perhaps it is that this Heschler harbored malice and wreaked vengeance on Monsieur Kolisko for the part he had in his conviction?''

''P'raps,'' agreed Costello shortly, ''but 'tain't likely.''

''And why not?'' the Frenchman demanded shortly. Like most men who keep their own counsel, he was easily annoyed by others' reticence.

''Because they burned him at Camden last night, sor.''

''Burned? How do you mean——''

''Sure, burned him. Bumped 'im off, rubbed 'im out, gave 'im th' chair—electrocuted 'im. He was a murderer, warn't he?'' Costello elucidated.

''U'm,'' the Frenchman gulped over the information like one trying to clear his mouth of an unpalatable

morsel, "you are doubtless right, Sergeant; we may regard this Heschler as eliminated—perhaps."

"P'raps?" echoed the amazed Irishman as I brought the car to a halt before the cottage door. "P'raps me neck! If you'll listen to me, I'll say he's been eliminated altogether entirely be th' State executioner!"

OUR search was startlingly unproductive. A few letters in envelopes with foreign postmarks, receipts for small bills for groceries and kindred household items, one or two invitations to meetings of learned societies—this was the sum total produced by an hour's rummaging among the dead man's papers.

"*Tiens,* it would seem we have come on the chase of the wild goose," de Grandin admitted disconsolately, wiping the sweat from his forehead with a pale blue silk handkerchief. "*Zut,* it seems impossible that any man should have so much paper of so little importance. Me, I think that——"

"Here's sumpin that might help us, if it's papers ye're after," Costello interrupted, appearing at the kitchen door with a rough wooden box in his hand. "I found it behint th' stove, sor. Most of it seems of little enough account, but you might find sumpin that'd——"

"Aside, stand aside, my friend!" the Frenchman ordered, leaping on the box like a famished cat on a mouse and scattering its contents over the living-room table. "What have we here? *Mordieu,* another receipt from that twenty-times-damned Public Service Company! Name of a rooster, did the man do nothing but contract and pay bills for electric light? Another one—and another! *Grand Dieu,* if I find but one more of these receipts I shall require a strait-waistcoat to restrain myself. What, another—ah, *triomphe!* At last we find something else!" From the pile of scrambled papers he unearthed a small, black-leather book and began riffling through its pages.

Pausing to read an inscription at random, he regarded the page with upraised brows and pursed lips, seated himself beside the table and brought his eyes to within a few inches of the small, crabbed writing with which the book seemed filled.

Five minutes he sat thus studying the memoranda, his brows gradually rising till I feared they would impinge upon the line of his smoothly combed blond hair. Finally: "My friends, this is of the importance," he assured us, looking quickly from one to the other with his queer, direct glance. "Monsieur Kolisko made these entries in his diary in mingled Polish and French. I shall endeavor to render them into English tonight, and tomorrow morning we shall go over them together. Thus far I have read little, but that little may explain much, or I am much mistaken."

"TROWBRIDGE, my friend," de Grandin requested the following morning when my round of calls was finished, "will you please read what I have written? All night I labored over this translation, and this morning my eyes are not sufficient to the task of reading my own script."

He thrust a sheaf of neatly written foolscap into my hands, then lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, his small hands locked behind his head, his eyes half closed, as he surveyed Costello and me lazily.

Glancing from de Grandin to the waiting detective, I set my pince-nez firmly on my nose and began:

April 5—Michel was here again last night, nagging me with his silly talk of the soul and its immortality. To think that one so well educated should entertain such childish ideas! I would have ordered him from the house in anger, as I did once before, had he not been more than usually insulting. After taunting me with the old story about a body's being weighed a few minutes after death and found lighter than before, thereby proving that something of material weight had passed from it, he challenged me to

prove the non-existence of any entity separate from the physical being. Fool! It is he who asserts the proposition, not I. Yet I must think of some way to confound him, or he will be everlastingly reminding me that I failed to meet his test.

April 10—Michel is a greater fool than I thought. I hold him and his faith in the hollow of my hand, and by his own act. Last night he proposed the wildest scheme ever broached by man. The burglar who broke into my house last month has been sentenced to death for killing a policeman. Michel would have me see the fellow in prison, arrange for a transmigration of his soul to a body which he will secure, and await results of the experiment. It is childish folly; I insult my own intelligence by agreeing to it, but I must silence Michel and his everlasting patter of the soul's immortality. I shall undertake the task, if only to prove my cousin a fool.

May 16—Yesterday I saw Heschler in prison. The poor fellow was almost beside himself with joy when I told him of Michel's wild plan. Not dying, but fear of punishment in the world to come seems to terrify the man. If I can provide a tenement for his soul which will enable it to remain away from the seat of judgment a little longer, he will be content, even though he has to live in the body of a child, a cripple or one already bowed with age. Living out the span of life in the second body we provide, he will so conduct himself as to win pardon for misdeeds committed in the frame he now wears, he vows. Poor, hoodwinked fool! Like all Christians, he is bound hand and foot by the old superstitions which have come down to us through the ages. That Heschler, the burglar, should adhere to the *Christus* myth, the God fairy-tale, is not surprizing, for he is but an ignorant clod; but that my cousin Michel Kolisko, a learned man, should give credit to beliefs which were outworn and disproved in the Nineteenth Century is beyond my understanding.

May 30—Today I had another talk with Heschler. He is pitiably anxious to begin the experiment. It was childishly simple. Ordering him to gaze stedfastly into my eyes through the bars of his cell, I soon had him completely hypnotized. "You will hereafter cease to dread your coming execution." I told him. "From this time forth you will think of nothing but the opportunity of living on in another body which is to be afforded you. At the moment of execution you will concentrate all your will upon entering the body which will be waiting at my home to receive your soul." He nodded as I gave each command, and I left him. It will not be necessary to repeat my orders. He was already half insane with the obsession of prolonging his life. My work was more than half done before I gave him the directions. I shall not see him again.

The next page bore a clipping from the *Newark Call:*

Adolph Heschler, confined in the penitentiary at Camden awaiting execution for the murder of State Trooper James Donovan on the night of March 20th last, seems resigned to his fate. When first taken to the state prison he seemed in deadly fear of death and spent most of his time in prayer. Prison officials say that he began to show signs of resignation following the memorial services on May 30th, and it is said he declares his conscience is cleared by the thought that he shall be allowed the opportunity of atoning for his misdeeds. Curiously enough, Heschler, who has heretofore shown the most devout appreciation of the ministrations of the prison's Catholic chaplain, will have nothing further to do with the spiritual advisor, declaring "atonement for his sins has been arranged." There is talk of having him examined by a lunacy commission before the date set for his execution.

Another translation of the diary followed:

August 30—Michel has come with the body. It is a mummy! When I expressed my astonishment, he told me it was the best possible corpse for the purpose. After hearing him, I realized he has the pseudologie of the mildly insane. The body of one who has died from natural causes or by violence would be unfitted for our purposes, he says, since some of its organs must inevitably be unable to function properly. This mummy is not a true mummy, but the body of an Egyptian guilty of sacrilege, who was sealed up alive in a tomb during the Hyksos dynasty. He died of asphyxia, in all probability, and his body is in perfect condition, except for the dehydration due to lying so many thousands of years in a perfectly dry atmosphere. Michel rescued the mummy during his last expedition to Egypt, and tells me there was evidence of the man's having made a terrific struggle before death put an end to his sufferings. Other bodies, properly mummified, were found in the same tomb, and the dying man had overturned many of the cases and spilled their contents about the place. His body was so thoroughly impregnated with the odor of the spices and preservatives, absorbed from the mummies lying in the tomb, that it was not for some time his discoverers realized he had not been eviscerated and embalmed. Michel assures me the dead man will be perfectly able to act as an envelope for

Heschler's soul when the electrocution has been performed. Cousin Michel, if this body does but so much as wiggle its fingers or toes after the authorities have killed Heschler, I will believe—I will believe.

I laid down the final page of de Grandin's translation and looked wonderingly at him. "Where's the rest of it?" I demanded. "Couldn't you do any more last night?"

"The rest," he answered ironically, "is for us to find out, my friends. The journal stops with the entry you have just read. There was no more."

"Humph," Sergeant Costello commented, "crazy as a pair o' fish out o' water, weren't they? Be gorry, gentlemen, I'm thinkin' it's a crazy man we'd best be lookin' for. I can see it all plain, now. This here Cousin Michael o' Professor Kolisko's was a religious fy-nat-ie, as th' felly says, an' th' pair o' 'em got to fightin' among themselves an' th' professor came out second best. That's th' answer, or my name ain't——"

The sudden shrilling of the office telephone interrupted him. "Sergeant Costello, please," a sharp voice demanded as I picked up the receiver.

"Yeah, this is Costello speakin'," the detective announced, taking the instrument from me. "Yep. All right, go ahead. *What?* Just like th' other one? My Gawd!"

"What is it?" de Grandin and I asked in chorus as he put down the receiver and turned a serious face to us.

"Miss Adkinson, an old lady livin' by herself out by th' cemetery, has been found murdered," he replied slowly, *"an' th' marks on her throat tally exactly wid those on Professor Kolisko's!"*

"Cordieu!" de Grandin shouted, leaping from his chair as if it had suddenly become white-hot. "We must hasten, we must rush, we must fly to that house, my friends! We must examine the body, we must assure ourselves before some bungling coroner's physician spoils everything!"

Two minutes later we were smashing the speed ordinances in an effort to reach the Adkinson house before Coroner Martin arrived.

STARK tragedy repeated itself in the Adkinson cottage. The old lady, gaunt with the leanness of age to which time has not been over-kind, lay in a crumpled heap on her kitchen floor, and a moment's examination disclosed the same livid marks on her throat and the same horrifying limberness of neck which we had observed when viewing Professor Kolisko's body.

"By Gawd, gentlemen, this is terrible!" Costello swore as he turned from the grisly relic. "Here's an old man kilt at night an' a harmless old woman murdered in broad daylight, an' no one to tell us anything certain about th' murderer!"

"Ha, do you say so?" de Grandin responded sharply, his little eyes flashing with excitement. *"Parbleu,* my friend, but you are greatly wrong, as wrong as can be. There *is* one who can tell us, and tell us he shall, if I must wring the truth from him with my bare hands!"

"What d'ye mean——?" Sergeant Costello began, but the little Frenchman had already turned toward the door, dragging frantically at my elbow.

"Clutch everything, *mes amis,*" he commanded. "Retain all; me, I go to find him who can tell us what we need to know. *Mordieu,* I shall find him though he takes refuge in the nethermost subcellar of hell! Come, Trowbridge, my friend; I would that you drive me to the station where I can entrain for New York."

SHORTLY after 7 o'clock that evening I answered the furious ringing of my telephone to hear de Grandin's excited voice come tumbling out of

the receiver. "Come at once, my friend," he ordered, fairly stuttering in his elation. "Rush with all speed to the Carmelite Fathers' retreat in East Thirty-second Street. Bring the excellent Costello with you, too, for there is one here who can shed the light of intelligence on our ignorance."

"Who is it——?" I began, but the sharp click of a receiver smashed into its hook cut short my query, and I turned in disgust from the unresponsive instrument to transmit the Frenchman's message to Sergeant Costello.

Within sight of Bellevue's grim mortuary, enshrouded by the folds of drab East River fog as a body is wrapped in its winding-sheet, the little religious community seemed as incongruously out of place in the heart of New York's poverty-ridden East Side as a nun in a sweatshop. Striding up and down the polished floor of the bare, immaculately clean reception-room was Jules de Grandin, a glowing cigarette between his fingers, his tiny, waxed mustache standing straight out from the corners of his mouth like the whiskers of an excited tom-cat. "At last!" he breathed as Costello and I followed the porter from the front door to the public room. "*Morbleu*, I thought you had perished on the way!

"*Monsieur*," he paused in his restless pacing and stopped before the figure sitting motionless in the hard, straight-backed chair at the farther side of the room, "you will please tell these gentlemen what you have told me and be of haste in doing so. We have small time to waste."

I glanced curiously at the seated man. His strong resemblance to the dead Kolisko was remarkable. He possessed a mop of untidy, iron-gray hair and a rather straggling gray beard; his forehead was high, narrow and startlingly white, almost transparent, and the skin of his face was puckered into hundreds of little wrinkles as though his skull had shrunk, leaving the epidermis without support. His eyes, however, differed radically from Kolisko's, for even in death the professor's orbs had shown a hard, implacable nature, whereas this man's eyes, though shaded by beetling, overhanging brows, were soft and brown. Somehow, they reminded me of the eyes of an old and very gentle dog begging not to be beaten.

"I am Michel Kolisko," he began, clearing his throat with a soft, deprecating cough. "Urban Kolisko was my cousin, son of my father's brother. We grew up together in Poland, attended the same schools and colleges, and dreamed the same dreams of Polish independence. I was twenty, Urban was twenty-three when the Tsar's officers swooped down on our fathers, carried them off to rot in Siberia, and confiscated most of our family's fortune. Both of us were suspected of complicity in the revolutionary movement, and fled for our lives, Urban to Paris, I to Vienna. He matriculated at the Sorbonne and devoted himself to the study of psychology; I studied medicine in Vienna, then went to Rome, and finally took up Egyptology as my life's work.

"Twenty years passed before I saw my cousin again. The Russian proscription had been raised, and he had gone to Warsaw, where he taught in the university. When I went there to visit him, I was shocked to learn he had abandoned God and taken to the worship of the material world. Kant, Spencer, Richet, Wundt—these were his prophets and his priests; the God of our fathers he disowned and denied. I argued with him, pleaded with him to return to his childhood's belief, and he turned me out of his house.

"Once again he earned the displeasure of the Tsar and escaped arrest only by a matter of moments.

Fleeing to this country, he took up residence in your city, and devoted himself to penning revolutionary propaganda and atheistic theses. Broken in health, but with sufficient money to insure me of a quiet old age, I followed him to America and made it the work of my declining years to convert him from his apostasy.

"This spring it seemed I was beginning to succeed, for he showed more patience with me than ever before; but he was a hardened sinner, his heart was steeled against the call of consciousness, even as was Pharaoh's of old. He challenged me to offer evidence of God's truth, and promised he would turn again to religion if I could."

For a moment the speaker paused in his monotonous, almost mumbled recitation, wrung his bloodless hands together in a gesture of despair, pressed his fingers to his forehead, as though to crowd back departing reason, then took up his story, never raising his voice, never stressing one word more than another, keeping his eyes fixed on vacancy. He reminded me of a child reciting a distasteful lesson by rote.

"I see we were both mad, now," he confided drearily. "Mad, mad with the sense of our own importance, for Urban defied divine providence, and I forgot that it is not man's right to attempt to prove God's truth as revealed to us by his ordained ministers. It is ours to believe, and to question not. But I was carried away by the fervor of my mission. 'If I can shake Urban's doubts, I shall surely win a crown of glory,' I told myself, 'for surely there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.' And so I went about the sacrilegious business of the test.

"Among the curios I had brought from Egypt was the body of a man sealed alive in a tomb during the Hyksos rule. It was not really a mummy, for no embalming had been performed, but the superheated atmosphere of the tomb in which he had been incarcerated had shriveled his tissues until it was difficult to tell him from a body mummified by artificial methods. Only three or four such bodies are known; one is the celebrated Flinders mummy, and the others are in French and British museums. I had intended leaving mine to the Metropolitan when I died.

"I brought this body to Urban's house the night before Heschler, the condemned murderer, was to be executed, and we laid it on the library table. Urban viewed it with disgust and skepticism, but I prayed over it, begging God to work a miracle, to permit the body to move, if only very slightly, and so convince my poor, misguided cousin. You know, gentlemen"—he turned his sorrowful, lackluster eyes on us with a melancholy smile—"such things are not entirely unknown. Sudden changes in temperature or in the moisture content of the atmosphere often lead to a movement as the dehydrated tissues take up water from the air. The mummy of Rameses the Great, for instance, moved its arm when first exposed to the outdoor air.

"A few minutes after midnight was the time set for Heschler's electrocution, and as the town clocks began sounding the hour I felt as though the heavens must fall if no sign were manifested to us.

"Urban sat beside the mummy, smoking his pipe and sneering—part of the time reading an impious book by Freud. I bowed my head in silent prayer, asking for a miracle to save him despite his hardness of heart. The city hall clock struck the quarter-hour, then the half, and still there was no sound. Urban laid his pipe and book aside and looked at me with his familiar sneer, then turned as though to thrust the body of the Egyptian from the table—*then it sat up!*

"Like a sleeper waking from a dream, like a patient coming forth from the ether it was—the corpse that had been dead four thousand years rose from the table and looked at us. For a moment it seemed to smile with its fleshless lips, then it looked down at itself, and gave a scream of surprize and fury.

" 'So!' it shrieked; 'so *this* is the body you've given me to work out my salvation! This is the form in which I must walk the earth until my sins be wiped away, is it? You've tricked me, cheated me; but I'll have vengeance. No one living can harm me, and I'll take my toll of human kind before I finally go forth to stew and burn in Satan's fires!'

"It was stiff and brittle, but somehow it managed to crawl from the table and make at Urban. He seized a heavy whip which hung on the wall and struck the thing on the head with its loaded butt. The blow would have killed an ordinary man—indeed, I saw the mummy's dried-up skull cave in beneath the force of Urban's flailings, but it never faltered in its attack, never missed a step in its pursuit of vengeance.

"Then I went mad. I fled from that accursed house and buried myself in this retreat, where I have spent every moment since, denying myself both food and sleep, deeming every second left me all too short to beg divine forgiveness for the terrible sacrilege I have committed."

"So, my friends, you see?" de Grandin turned to Costello and me as the half-hysterical Pole concluded his preposterous narrative.

"Sure, I do," the detective returned. "Didn't th' felly say he's mad? Be dad, they say crazy folks tell th' truth, an' he ain't stretchin' it none when he says his steeple's full o' bats."

"Ah bah!" de Grandin shot back. "You weary me, my friend."

To Kolisko he said: "Your story supplies the information which we so sorely needed, sir. Whatever the result of your experiment, your motives were good, nor do I think the good God will be too hard upon you. If you do truly wish forgiveness, pray that we shall be successful in destroying the monster before more harm is done. *Cordieu,* but we shall need all your prayers, and a vast deal of luck as well, I think; for killing that which is already dead is no small task."

"Now what?" demanded Costello with a sidelong glance at de Grandin as we emerged from the religious house. "Got some more loonies for us to listen to?"

"*Parbleu,* if you will but give ear to your own prattle, you shall have all that sort of conversation you wish, I think, *cher Sergent,*" the little Frenchman jerked back with a smile which took half the acid from his words. Then:

"Friend Trowbridge, convoy our good, unbelieving friend to Harrisonville and await my return. I have one or two things to attend to before I join you; but when I come I think I can promise you a show the like of which you have not before seen. *Au revoir, mes enfants.*"

Ten o'clock sounded on the city's clocks; eleven; half-past. Costello and I consumed innumerable cigars and more than one potion of some excellent cognac I had stored in my cellar since the days before prohibition; still no sign of my little friend. The sergeant was on the point of taking his departure when a light step sounded on the porch and de Grandin came bounding into the consulting-room, his face wreathed in smiles, a heavy-looking parcel gripped under his right arm.

"*Bien,* my friends, I find you in good time," he greeted, poured himself a monstrous stoup of amber liquor, then helped himself to one of my cigars. "I think it high time we were on our way. There is that to

do which may take considerable doing this night, but I would not that we delay our expedition because of difficulties in the road."

"Be gorry, he's caught it from th' other nut!" Costello confided to the surrounding atmosphere with a serio-comic grimace. "Which crazy house are we goin' to now, sor?"

"Where but to the house of Monsieur Kolisko?" returned the Frenchman with a grin. "I think there will be another there before long, and it is highly expedient that we be there first."

"Humph, if it's Coroner Martin or his physician, you needn't be worryin' yourself anny," Costello assured him. "They'll be takin' no more interest in th' case till someone else gets kilt, I'm thinkin'."

"*Morbleu*, then their days of interest are ended, or Jules de Grandin is a colossal liar," was the response. "Come; *allons vite!*"

THE lowest workings of a coal mine were not darker than the Kolisko house when we let ourselves in some fifteen minutes later. Switching on the electric light, de Grandin proceeded to unpack his parcel, taking from it a folded black object which resembled a deflated association football. Next he produced a shining nickel-plated apparatus consisting of a thick upright cylinder and a transverse flat piece which opened in two on hinges, disclosing an interior resembling a waffle-iron with small, close-set knobs. Into a screw-stopped opening in the hollow cylinder of the contrivance he poured several ounces of gray-black powder; then, taking the flat rubber bag, he hurried from the house to my car, attached the valve of the bag to my tire pump and proceeded to inflate the rubber bladder almost to the bursting point. This done, he attached the bag to a valve in the nickeled cylinder by a two-foot length of rubber hose, poured some liquid over the corrugated "waffle-iron" at the top of the cylinder, and, with the inflated bag hugged under his arm, as a Highland piper might hold the bag of his pipes, he strode across the room, snapped off the light, and took his station near the open window.

Several times Costello and I addressed him, but each time he cut us short with a sharp, irritable "Sssh!" continuing his crouching watch beside the window, staring intently into the shaded garden beyond.

It must have been some three-quarters of an hour later that we sensed, rather than heard, the scuffling of light footfalls on the grass outside, heard the door-knob cautiously tested, then the scuttering of more steps, scarcely louder than the sound of wind-blown leaves, as the visitant rounded the cottage wall and made for the window beside which de Grandin mounted guard.

A puff of autumn wind, scented with the last blooms of summer's rose-beds, sent the light clouds drifting from before the moon's pale lantern, and, illuminated in the pallid light of the night's goddess, we saw framed at the window-square the terrifying vision which had followed young Ratliff's story of his escape two nights before.

"My Gawd!" Costello's bass voice was shrill and treble with sudden terror as the thing gazed malevolently in at us. Next instant his heavy service revolver was out, and shot after shot poured straight into the hideous, grinning face at the window.

He might as well have fired boiled beans from a pea-shooter for all the effect his bullets had. Distinctly I saw a portion of the mummy's ear clipped off by a flying slug of lead, saw an indentation sink in the thing's head half an inch above the right eye as a soft-nosed bullet tore through skin and withered flesh and frontal bone; but the emaciated body never paused in its progress. One withered

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A Five-Minute Story

THE OWL ON THE MOOR

By MARC R. SCHORER and AUGUST W. DERLETH

[*The following letter, crumpled and yellow with age, was found among the personal effects of the late M. R. Bentley, Barrister.*]

Brandon,
Egdon Heath,
17th May, 1908.

MY DEAR Morris:

I am all excited! Do you remember the controversy we had about witchcraft a summer ago? I'm sure you can recall it. It is about an unusual development which hinges directly upon this controversy that I am excited.

On May first I arrived here in this small hamlet bordering the famous Egdon heath, the setting of Thomas Hardy's noted *Return of the Native*, for my annual month's vacation. Of course, the furze and bracken attracted me the very first day, and I began to wander about alone on the heath. I often walked far out; sometimes, even, I was perplexed as to my direction. One day I chanced to wander farther than usual and I came upon the lowlands of the heath—a dank, miry moor far in the heart of it.

I was startled that I had wandered so far, and, as twilight was not far distant, I hastily began to return when my eyes caught sight of a solitary cottage, or possibly I should call it a shack, for, indeed, it resembled the latter much more than the former. I stared in bewilderment, thinking that perhaps my eyes had deceived me, and that I had conjured up a hallucination. But no; the shack didn't vanish as I half expected it to when I closed my eyes. Not that the appearance of a shack in this lone place surprized me to that extent, but there was smoke curling up from the crumbling chimney. I hesitated for some little time, and then turned and proceeded moodily homeward, determined to question the villagers about the dweller in the shack.

And question them I did. A woman lives there. Don't laugh, for that's all they told me. Who she is, where she came from, what is her business, how does she subsist—of that they know nothing; they do not even hint at the answers to these questions. The people here are peace-loving folk, and it takes much to stir them, but it was clear to see that they hated that woman with all their hearts. This fact perplexed me sorely, but after incessant prying I found the reason.

She had been out there on the moor living her life of solitude for two years. She never came to the village, or if she did come she was never seen. Shortly after her coming a mysterious death came to one of the villagers: he was found out on the moor, his face a marble carving of fear and fascination. An examination revealed several minute scratches on the head and face of the dead man, which the doctor failed to diagnose. This, in itself, was extraordinary. And several months later another man was found dead on the heath, a good distance from the moor, with the same peculiar scratches

about the head, and with that same expression of awful horror. The next death bore the same distinctive marks, but this time it was a woman that suffered. And other deaths occurred, and because the dead were always found out upon the lonely heath where only the woman walked, the villagers came to regard her with loathing and suspicion. Even the furze-cutters ceased their work, and people seldom rambled on the heath, for they did not know in what form this malignant death might approach and overcome them.

You can well imagine my astonishment at learning these things. However, this tale of sudden deaths did not deter me from my daily rambles on the heath. But I will admit that I was constantly on the alert for any hidden danger that might descend upon me.

For the first few days I gave the shack a wide berth, and wended my way within sight of the village. But I soon reflected what childish folly this was, and I became bolder and bolder.

One day I ventured within sight of the shack. I crouched half-hidden in the gorse for an appreciable length of time, but I observed no signs of life. This surprized me, perhaps unduly, and I moved cautiously nearer. Again I halted, breathless. I wondered what would happen, should the woman discern me, and I kept my eyes fastened upon the door of the shack, which swung loosely open on one hinge that creaked loudly in the silence as a fanciful breeze came against the door. But nothing happened. There was no indication of life; all was an oppressive, deathlike stillness, broken only at intervals by the eery call of a bird, which came to me across the bracken, and, sweeping past me, died lingeringly away in the distance.

I halted there for some time, half expecting some fearful apparition to emerge from the darkness of the doorway and pounce upon me and devour me before I could so much as move. But finally, annoyed at this apparently over-cautious attitude, I rose and strode boldly forward, fully determined to enter the evidently forsaken shack. Then suddenly I stopped short; for to my ears came the low, almost imperceptible sound of moaning.

That the moaning proceeded from the shack I could not doubt. Indubitably the mysterious inhabitant was ill. With this conviction in mind I proceeded forward, hesitating only at the threshold. The moaning was very distinct now, and I entered almost at once.

Picture, if you can, my astonishment at finding the one-room structure totally devoid of all human inhabitation. My eyes swept the room in a vain endeavor to pierce the shadows and discover the source of the sound which dinned in my ears. But I could perceive nothing. I then gave my attention to the squalid interior. The furniture in the room consisted of a table, upon which some broken dishes were standing, and three chairs, one broken and sadly in need of repair. The odd feature of this assembly of furniture was the fact that there was no bed. Surely this woman did not sleep upon the floor! I ridiculed the idea, but the fact remained that there was no bed.

It was soon impressed upon me that the room lacked the essentialities of a living-room. There was no evidence of a container of food of any sort, nor were there signs of the remains of any recently eaten meal. My eyes swept in these things at a glance, and meanwhile the low moaning continued in the same monotonous tone.

This hidden moaning irritated me, and I began to peer intently on all sides. I glanced under the table and moved the chairs about. Quite suddenly I saw the source of the mysterious moaning sound. Looking up in the rafters I saw two great, round

eyes turned upon me in an unblinking stare. It was a huge owl!

This incident seemed very odd to me at first. I had not seen an owl in the vicinity during my stay, and the sudden appearance of this bird startled me. It showed no inclination to leave its perch, nor did I endeavor to excite it. To be sure, I lost no time in beating a retreat, whether or not I was justified in doing so. I ran swiftly through the gorse toward the village. On a little knoll some distance from the shack I turned about and looked back. The woman, who had been nowhere about, was standing in the open door staring after me!

I was astounded; I readily confess it. A thousand questions perplexed me. How could she have gotten there? Where could she have been hiding, if indeed she was hiding? Could she have been in the gorse watching my every move? When she saw me gazing at her, she turned and went into the shack.

For some time I stood looking at the doorway where she had been. Then I went swiftly home, wondering about her untimely appearance.

Two nights later, while I was reading a treatise on witchcraft, I was seized with a horrible suspicion. I was, so to speak, as if a spell or charm had been cast over me. The suspicion rapidly became a conviction, and, acting upon it, I procured my pistol and without delay I ventured out upon the moor.

It was a beautiful night. The moon was out, and it lighted the moor as far as the eye could reach. But the waving of the bracken and gorse beneath the moon was not beautiful to me, for I thought of nothing but the terrible suspicion that had lodged in my mind.

Just as I reached the knoll upon which I had stood two days before, I saw a scene which I shall never forget. A man, who had evidently come from some point on the other side of the moor, was struggling with a huge owl! He was fending off the clutching talons as best he could, and the moonlight clearly showed the agony on his features.

The sight almost paralyzed me. But luckily for both of us, I retained my presence of mind, and, with the conviction of my suspicion in mind, I drew my pistol and fired pointblank at the monstrous bird, murmuring a prayer for the safety of the stranger. Both the man and the bird fell to the ground. I made the best of time to the spot to reckon what injuries the man had received.

The man was not severely injured; he was, however, unconscious. But the worst detail of the incident was the final confirmation of my awful suspicions.

Upon the ground near the man lay the body of a woman, a bullet hole through her breast!

Yours,

HARCOURT.

A Tale of the Witchcraft Craze

The Dogs of Salem

By DAVID H. KELLER

FOR several reasons the people of Salem did not feel kindly toward the two cobblers who had decided to make that town their home. It is true that they made very good shoes, which were greatly needed by the settlers: not only made good new shoes but were more than willing to repair old ones—an economy which should have appealed to the thrifty Puritans. It was also remarked to their credit that they always attended church on the Lord's day, and on that day and all others behaved and conducted themselves with the greatest propriety.

Yet, in spite of all this, the fact remained that they were foreigners, probably Italians or Spaniards. For all anyone knew they might be papists, spies, traitors to the very people who kept them alive by wearing their shoes. Then, too, the twin daughters of the richest man in town were more friendly to these nobodies than the other young men liked to see. In fact, the brother cobblers were not at all popular socially as far as the men were concerned, even though the women all looked at them sidewise.

Timothy Thomas did not like them; he hated them both equally, Amos of the dark hair and Andrew of the fair skin. Repeatedly he warned his daughters not to have any dealings with them, but Anna and Ruth kept on making trips to the cobbler shop. It was astonishing how fast their shoes wore out. The father scolded and threatened and chided and prayed over his daughters, but they kept on wearing out their shoes and going to have them repaired, and nothing could keep the four young people apart. Angry and vexed, Timothy Thomas grew melancholy.

He had almost reached the point where he was ready to lock his daughters in their bedroom when the entire settlement was agitated and disturbed by the working of witches among the simple folk. After a lot of talk and gossip, Bridget Bishop was brought to trial on the 2nd of June, 1692.

Her case was a very clear one. Even the judges felt that the trial was simply a legal formality, but none the less took testimony of several persons. One said that this witch had looked at her and at once she had been seized by the colic. Another man stated that he was standing in the door of his house with an apple in his hand; the witch looked at him and the apple jumped out of his hand and landed in his mother's lap. A young woman told how she had had a dream of a man assaulting her, but when she cried out the man proved to be Bridget Bishop. There was no doubt that she had power over the people: if she so much as scratched her head during the trial at least a dozen young girls in the courtroom did the same, like so many monkeys. One very important witness, who had been caused to fall into fits for many years by this witch, came to tell her story, but Bridget looked at her and she was kept from talking by the appearance of another fit.

There was nothing to do but to condemn this follower of the Devil to death, and this was done.

Susanna Martin was tried on the 29th of June, 1692. She was accused of many things, but mainly of keeping imps of darkness around her house in the shape of black dogs. If she disliked a man she would give him a black puppy, and in the course of time this young dog would have fits and run and bite the man and his children. She also took unfortunate Joseph Ring with her to a Sabbat, at which place he was given a knock on the back, which made him motionless, unable to move or to speak. At these places the Devil tried to make him sign a book, but this he refused to do. After his return to his bed he would awake sore in the muscles and bruised over his body. Susanna Martin showed plainly that she was guilty by pleading that she had led a most virtuous and holy life. This, of course, was a most absurd statement for her to make when everyone knew that she actually kept black dogs.

As a result of these and similar trials nineteen persons were hanged. Among these was Mr. George Borroughs, a preacher, who showed positively that he was a witch by affirming often in public that the whole excitement was due to ignorance and superstition. There were some who believed him and opposed his execution, but the Reverend Cotton Mather appeared near the scaffold on horseback and said he knew the man was a witch and impostor and that those who pitied him were his comrades and likewise under the power of the Devil. After this speech Borroughs was hanged without any more protest, save from his own lips, which did not count.

To the surprize of all, the more witches that were hanged, the more the good people were afflicted by the evil works of the Devil and his emissaries. Many young girls had fits, were found with hair in their mouths and crooked pins inside their fast-closed hands. Persons who were unsuspected came forward and stated that they were witches and asked to be hanged with their comrades. Occasionally a suspected person was obdurate and would neither answer questions nor plead guilty or innocent. One such case, a man, was put between two boards and pressed to death. At the very end he made signs that he was willing to speak, but the blood filled his mouth and he died silent. Those who saw this were satisfied that the Devil had sent the blood to keep him still, which was a very satisfactory explanation to all, especially the judges who had ordered the pressing.

TIMOTHY THOMAS attended many of these trials. He was even a juryman when Elizabeth How was tried at Salem on the 30th of June, 1692. After such a liberal education he felt that he knew considerable about the diabolical mechanisms of these followers of Satan. The entire community considered him an authority on the subject.

Meantime the intimacy between his daughters and the two young cobblers continued, and Mr. Thomas, for all his wealth and power, seemed unable to stop it. He continued to brood over it.

To his great surprize a half-witted boy came to his house one evening and whispered to him that he had seen the two cobblers while they were in swimming and that each of them had the Devil's mark on his shoulder. The imbecile also declared that they looked at him and laughingly whispered to themselves, and that on the way home he was set upon by two large black dogs. Mr. Thomas talked at length to the boy, and the next day, which was the Lord's day, this same boy shrieked out in meeting that he was being bitten by two dogs and that their names were Amos and Andrew. There were marks on the boy's arms which looked like the signs of teeth. The minister, Mr. Price, immediately consulted with the magistrate and

with Mr. Timothy Thomas, with the result that the two cobblers were at once arrested—indeed they were captured by the soldiers in the meeting-house before they had time to escape—and were securely placed in the town prison.

When they were brought to trial there were some among the citizens who said in whispers that the whole matter was worthless as all knew Smiling Samuel to be a natural and a nit-wit. However, it was a different matter when Mr. Thomas himself took the stand and swore to these things as of his own knowledge and not as hearsay. He demanded that the cobblers be examined for the mark of the Beast. There it was on the left shoulder of each, a red mark similar to the head of a goat; of course it had been changed since Smiling Samuel saw it, for he stated after kissing the Book, that it was three times larger and looked like the pit of hell itself.

Things began to look bad for the cobblers. Mr. Thomas said he saw the boy when he fell and said the dogs were after him. Even while he was giving his testimony, a woman in the audience, a very good and pious lady of great charity, cried out so all could hear, "They come and bite me. Lord Jesus, save me from the black dogs!" and fell in a fit. When she was examined, the marks of teeth were found on her wrist and in her hand a bent pin stuck into the flesh, which she said Amos Canning had thrown at her from his eye.

Dr. Smithers was called to examine the Devil's marks. He found that they did not bleed when stuck by a pin.

At this part of the trial the judge asked the two men what they had to say concerning the accusations and just who the dogs were who had bitten all these people. The brothers whispered between themselves, and then Amos, being the elder, arose and said that they were innocent of any harm, that they had led good lives, and as for the marks on them, they had been born with them. He also stated that it was time for the people of Salem to come to their senses and stop believing such nonsense.

Of course, after that, there was nothing to do save give the matter to the jury, and while they took longer at it than was the usual habit of juries in such cases, still they finally declared the two brothers guilty. Without delay the judge sentenced them to be hanged on the third day from that time.

ON THE morning of this day the jailer, going, as was his habit, to carry to the condemned their breakfast, was startled to find the brothers not in their cell. But in the cell securely fastened by fetters and chains were two black dogs, who howled dismally and tried to break their bonds and attack the frightened man.

Closing and locking the door, he at once ran to the house of the magistrate, who, when he heard the tale, went to see the minister, Mr. Price. The two, on their way to the jail, called out Mr. Timothy Thomas to go with them. It was early in the day, and neither of the Thomas damsels had arisen to begin the day's work, so Mr. Thomas, interested beyond measure at the news, went eagerly with the other officials, and on the way a large crowd joined them, the jailer's wife having lost no time in spreading the news of the metamorphosis, though of course she did not use that name in telling the story.

Arriving at the cell, they found it an easy matter to confirm the jailer's story. The men were not there but the dogs were. The sharp eyes of the minister, however, saw something that the jailer had not noticed. This was a message written on parchment, and while the body of the letter was printed in capital letters, still the signa-

tures were in bold script. Clearing his throat, the minister read in loud tones, so that all could hear:

TO OUR DEAR FRIENDS IN SALEM:

HAVING NO DESIRE TO DIE YOUNG AND IN SUCH A MANNER AS HANGING WE CONSIDERED IT THE PROPER THING TO ASK FOR AID AND WE THEREFORE APPEALED TO OUR GOD AND HE DIRECTED US THAT UPON A CERTAIN NIGHT HE WOULD CHANGE OUR SHAPES INTO THOSE OF BLACK DOGS & THEY TO STAY IN PRISON AND SUFFER FOR US THE PENALTY OF OUR SINS. OUR GOD TOLD US THAT OUR SPIRITS WOULD ROAM FREE OF SALEM & NORTHWARD INTO THE GREAT WOODS THERE TO ABIDE WITH TWO SALAMANDERS IN PEACE AND HAPPINESS AS A REWARD FOR OUR SUFFERINGS IN SALEM & WE WARN EVERY ONE NOT TO FOLLOW US IN OUR FLIGHT THROUGH THE AIR AS WE WILL BE PROTECTED BY A MIGHTY FOLLOWING OF MAN-EATING BIRDS OF PREY.

WITNESS OUR HAND AND SEAL GIVEN IN THIS YEAR OF THE DEVIL ASMODEUS ***1692.

AMOS CANNING
ANDREW CANNING.

This letter caused a sensation, even among the most hardened witch-hunters. If this Devil could thus save two of his witches where would his power stop? Denunciations were heard on all sides and the excitement rose to such a pitch that the minister, Mr. Price, suggested that he lead them in prayer for divine guidance. After doing so—and his prayer was a wonderful one in many ways, in spite of the howling of the dogs—he asked Mr. Timothy Thomas if he felt the spirit of the Lord directing him. That gentleman, without the least hesitation, replied that he felt God telling him in the spirit that these two familiars of the witches should suffer the penalty of death. Thereat the magistrate directed the soldiers to take them to the scaffold and at once hang them. So on the same gallows where the witches had been hanged, these two black devil dogs gasped out their lives, after which they were burned on fagots while the minister, Mr. Price, preached a sermon, more powerful than usual in its denunciation of the Devil and his worshipers. During this sermon Smiling Samuel cried, "I see them, I see them flying through the air!"

It was nearly 10 in the morning before Mr. Timothy Thomas returned to his home. There were no signs of either of his daughters, or breakfast. A frantic search failed to locate either Anna or Ruth. A more careful investigation showed him that his strong-box was broken into and much of his wealth taken from it. This loss threw him into a brain fever, which held him bedfast for many months. When he recovered he found that no one wanted to talk about witchcraft any more, the good folk of Salem having recovered from their period of hysteria.

None the less he counted the two damsels as being dead and in the hands of the Devil, and he mourned for them the rest of his life, nor could he be reconciled to his loss.

SHORTLY after the hanging of the two dogs, the jailer, who had always been a poor man and therefore considered honest, moved to Pennsylvania, where he bought a large plantation from the Penns, paying for it outright in gold.

For many years after that there lived in Quebec two cobblers, noted for the excellency of their work and for the beauty of their wives.

The OATH of HUL-JOK

BY NICTZIN DYALHIS

"They set before us various portions, both cooked and raw."

"*KAH-PLANG!*"

The Kalion tablet on the wall above my scribble-table rang out its sonorous summons. I raised my eyes, giving vent, as I did so, to an impatient expletive. I hate interruptions when I am attempting to compose a poem. But the message which flamed out in luminous letters on the tablet's dull gray surface made me change my tone from impatience to amazement, although I repeated the same expletive.

In the ragged script I beheld was traceable no resemblance to the usually perfect characters distinguishing our greatest Venhezian scientist, Ron Ti. It did not need that I read the message to assure me he must be terribly perturbed; and the words themselves but confirmed that impression. The message ran:

Hak Iri: I must see you at once. I am in sore trouble, and need your advice.

RON TI.

I rose to my feet and caught up the scribble-stick where it hung at the end of its thin gold chain below the tablet. The flaming letters of Ron Ti's message had already faded as soon as read. He was my friend, had stated that he needed me. What was to write save:

Shall I come to you, or will you come here? Am, as ever, at your command.

HAK IRI.

Touching the tablet with my forefinger, I will-wafted the reply, saw the letters flame and fade, and waited but a brief second before the

clanging sound repeated and once again there shone out a sentence:

Am coming to you. Wait.

RON TI.

I reseated myself, in my mind a queer mixture of curiosity and sympathy.

Ron Ti, despite all his wisdom and poise, in trouble, and needing advice from humble me, Hak Iri, writer and recorder of the deeds of greater men? What could be untoward? This our planet Venhez was all too well regulated for strange occurrences to take place; as, for that matter, were all the other inhabited worlds of the Planetary Chain.

Was it war? I asked myself; and replied to myself that that idea was nonsense! For war, that colossal folly, was a thing of the remote and barbarous past on and between the known Inhabited Planets. It cost too much in lives and misery for aught accruing of gain.

True, the Planets each maintain a colossal war-fleet, armed with terrific disintegrators—great ak-blastors on the aethir-torps and the tiny but not less proportionately deadly hand-size blastors for individual encounter; as we reason that the best method of insuring peace is to make war so frightful that no race will prove temerarious enough to venture its hazards.

Still, within scope of my own memory was one war. But that was, really, only a brief affray, what time Ron Ti, Hul Jok, Mor Ag, Vir Dax, Toj Qul, Lan Apo, and myself had gone to the Green Star, Aerth, and had found there an appalling state of affairs prevailing. On our return to Venhez we had stirred up first our own Venhezian Supreme Council, and, after, the ruling minds of the other worlds to an aggressive expedition which resulted in the destruction of the Lunarion Pollution—as our historians now term it. But that was the only strife recorded for ages back. . . .

"KAH-PLANG!"

That slamming note could emanate from but one inhabitant of our world. It was entirely characteristic of his fierce impetuous spirit. And the flame-symbols, as they flared, proved me right as I read:

Hak Iri: I am coming to your abode, for I need your brain to help me.

HUL JOK.

But this was serious. Ron Ti in trouble and needing advice meant no ordinary matter; but when Hul Jok, War-Prince and Commander in Chief of all our Venhezian Planetary Forces of Offense and Defense was likewise in need of *my* brain! . . . And those two were positively the most self-capable men I knew, and should be able to cope with any and all problems pertaining to themselves without enlisting outside aid. . . . It was all beyond me . . . yet, war perhaps it was . . . intuition. . . .

"Kah-plang!"

Short, terse, incisive. Vir Dax, this, he who juggled successfully with the powers of Life, the shrewdest and wisest dispenser of remedies, powders, and decoctions in our capital city Ash-Tar. And I swore again as I read his flame-words, for he, too, was in mental distress and desired to see me forthwith.

Well, I was in my own abode, and presumably master therein; and Our Lady of Bliss forfend if ever I denied myself to a friend who needed me. So I replied to Vir Dax precisely as I had done to Ron Ti and Hul Jok—that I, and all that was mine, were his likewise. And had no sooner finished than:

"Kah-kah-plang-ang-ang!"

It was only by mercy of the Guardian Powers that my sorely abused Kalion tablet did not fuse from the intensity of the three superposed flame-messages blazing on its surface! I said things—uncomplimentary, very—about my friends and their lack of consideration; for no Planetary reason could excuse such pre-

cipitancy! And then I paused, aghast, as well I might, for those last messages were from the rest of our group—namely: Toj Qul, Chief Diplomat of Interplanetary Affairs; Mor Ag, who knew the races, languages, habits, manners and customs, ancient and modern, of every inhabited world as no other man ever did know them; and young Lan Apo, whose gift was unique, in that he could unerringly detect, when listening to anyone, be it Venhezian, Markhurian, Satornian, Mharzian, or even from far-flung Ooranos, Planet of the Unexpected—Lan Apo could, I repeat, detect infallibly whether the speaker spoke pure truth or calculated falsehoor. More—he could even read the truth held back while seemingly listening attentively to the lie put forward! A valuable asset, he, to our Venhezian civilization, but somewhat an uncomfortable friend to have about, at times!

I know, I have already described these my friends, in that record I have set forth for the benefit of the future generations, that record entitled *When the Green Star Waned;** and I know, too, that that record not only reposes among our Venhezian archives, but has been copied into every language spoken on every one of the major inhabited planets, and is preserved thus, for all time; but it does no hurt to repeat their descriptions as—but I digress.

THEY arrived well-nigh simultaneously, and gazed at one another in somewhat of bewilderment, for each had supposed that he, and he alone, had wanted to see me. It was I who broke the spell which had come upon them.

"It seems," I said, "that you each have a grief and have done me the honor of seeking my advice——"

And at that point Hul Jok, the practical, interrupted.

"Right," he growled, adding, "and speaking for myself, I care not if you all know my trouble. We seven——"

"Are even as one," suggested Toj Qul, smoothly.

"True," nodded Ron Ti. "It is so with me."

"So, I think, is it with all of us," ratified Lan Apo.

A unanimous sigh of relief went up. If Lan Apo had spoken thus, no need existed of reticence among us. He had, as usual, read our true thoughts.

But then Lan Apo doubled up in a sudden spasm of mirth, straightening his features promptly, however, as he beheld Hul Jok's unpleasant scowl fixed upon him.

"Suppose we allow Ron Ti to speak first," I proposed. "He it was who notified me first that he desired to consult with me on an important matter."

Again Lan Apo, despite his lugubrious expression, snickered; whereat Ron Ti flushed painfully; while Hul Jok made a queer snarling sound deep in his throat.

"It is Alu Rai," began Ron Ti. And at that, catching the eye of Lan Apo, I grinned, too, for I began to see, also—or thought I did.

"She was gentle, tender, affectionate," Ron Ti groaned. "What has come to her, I comprehend not at all; but she has become a veritable goblin of perverseness. I can not devote myself to my experiments for Planetary Benefit as I should, for my mental perturbation! She is a disturbance incarnate; nor is she amenable to reason; nor will she explain her attitude. Seek I her arms for rest and inspiration, she delights, instead, in tormenting me——"

"Precisely my trouble with Ota Lis," said Vir Dax gravely.

"Mine, too, with Cho Als," vouchsafed Toj Qul sadly, adding: "And

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I, who am accredited with being able to talk a bird off a bough, can not persuade her, my Love-Girl, to tell me why this state of affairs should prevail."

"My fix, exactly," stated lugubrious young Lan Apo. "Kia Min, gentlest of her sex, is so obdurate that I can not read her mind!"

The others groaned, looking exceedingly glum at this; from which we all understood that in every case the trouble was identical. All but mine! I—I was exempt! And I swelled with pride thereat.

"*I* am untroubled," I boasted. "I will see Esa Nal and instruct her to visit your Love-Girls and ascertain——"

"*Kah-plang!*"

And the message we all read, although meant for me alone, left me in a state of perturbation worse even than all the other six of our group put together.

And once again Lan Apo, the irrepressible, snickered. But I was aghast. Esa Nal, *my* Love-Maid!

Then that hereditary temper bequeathed me by my turbulent namesake Hak Iri who lived two thousand years agone, flamed within me, and what I indited and flashed to Esa Nal should have blinded her soft, golden-brown eyes for hours, once she gazed upon those sentences. Words are my trade. And I know that upon that occasion I surpassed myself, rising to heights of objurgation and invective hitherto undreamed.

Ron Ti sighed in envy.

"Hak Iri," he murmured, generous as ever, complimenting me, even in his own distress, "could I but express myself thus to Alu Rai, I'd cheerfully pay as price for that ability that reputation I hold as the greatest living scientist on all the worlds."

"I, too," growled Huk Jok. "But after all, what are words? Less than nothing, where Love-Girls are concerned! Although," he continued grumpily, "I can not say that my method was any improvement."

"*Your* method?"

Lan Apo's eyes were dancing with mirth as he caught Hul Jok's hidden thought, albeit his face stayed sober.

"Aye," rumbled the badgered giant, "*my method!* I did lay Hala Fau face downward across my knee and——"

But that was too much! And we all burst into a shout of laughter as we each pictured that strapping termagant, Hala Fau, in the predicament of a naughty child. Yet the mirth died, abruptly, as is usual with ill-timed merriment, and we gazed at each other even more blankly than at first.

And then Jon the Aerthon, without stopping at the door to announce himself, burst, incontinent, into the room and crossed it straight to Mor Ag, who, aside from Ron Ti, was the only one of us who spoke his Aerth-tongue fluently. And what Jon gasped out in his excitement turned Mor Ag's face a deathly white.

"Great Power of Life!" Mor Ag ejaculated blasphemously. "That accurst Lunarion!"

Lan Apo's face was a study in horror and grief, although the rest of us were puzzled, bewildered, and, as is usual when the untoward intrudes itself into well regulated lives, we were more than a little angry. But then, simultaneously, realization came to us, one and all. Not in detail, of course, but enough.

When we returned from Aerth on that momentous first trip, we had brought with us a captive Lunarion. By decision of our Supreme Council "It" had been kept confined in our Planetary Museum of Strange Things, held prisoner in a specially devised cage, from which, despite all Its evil will-force, It could in no-wise liberate Itself. Ron Ti had designed and constructed that cage, charging it with restraining vibrations in some mysterious manner

known solely to his profound scientific brain. But whatever had been the method he'd employed, it had so far worked.

But now!

It was apparent that the Lunarion had escaped. And we all knew Its fiendish malignancy, and Its even more demoniacal hatred for everyone and everything not of Its own type. And being of at least average intelligence, we all knew, irrefutably, that It had doubtless already revenged Itself.

But how?

Then Mor Ag spoke, slowly, dully, setting forth in plain words what Jon the Aerthon had reported in broken, excited phrases. And in substance, without quoting Jon's exact words, thus it was:

When we brought Jon with us to Venhez, Ron Ti, learning that Jon was accustomed to working in metals, had given the Aerthon place in the Experimental Laboratory over which he, Ron Ti, presided.

It had been Jon's custom, when his tasks were ended, solely as recreation to go to the Museum of Strange Things and jeer at the last survivor of his hated Master-Race. It did him good, so Jon said, to swear at the Lunarion and behold Its impotent fury at being thus mocked by one of Its former slaves.

Jon had arrived somewhat earlier than usual one night not so long back; and had observed Alu Rai standing gazing at the captive "Moun-Thing." Again, upon another occasion Jon had found several other girls whom he recognized accompanying Alu Rai. Jon had thought nothing of it, as to him it seemed but natural that the girls should be interested in the captive their men had brought to Venhez, where nothing like It had ever before been dreamed of. . . .

And at that point, Ron Ti groaned again, in anguish of spirit.

"That demon, that demon! It has will-witched them all. Our Lady of Venhez only knows——"

But Mor Ag continued as though no interruption had occurred:

"Tonight, not an hour ago, Jon saw all seven of our Love-Girls stand before the cage again. Alu Rai in some manner neutralized the imprisoning vibration, and the Lunarion *oozed* out—free! Knowing himself as being impotent to cope with it, Jon did the next best thing, and followed It and our girls. By the darkest ways It went, Alu Rai guiding and the other girls following. They went straight to the Great Central War Castle.

There, Hala Fau, displaying the diamond Looped Cross, Hul Jok's symbol of authority, caused the guards to bring forth the great acthir-torp *Victuri,* Hul Jok's own fighting-craft. Into this they entered, and then that Lunarion, becoming in some manner aware of Jon's espionage, will-forced the Aerthon to Its presence and gave him a message for Hul Jok! After which It, too, entered, and the aethir-torp, with Hala Fau at the controls, shot away into outer space. After which, again, Jon hastened back to Ron Ti's workshop hoping to find him there; thence to his abode; and, finally, here.

"But that message for me?" demanded Hul Jok truculently.

Mor Ag stammered, hesitant, ill at ease. But Hul Jok was in no mood for evasions. His voice held a strangely repressed note as he spoke slowly.

"That—message—Mor Ag! I speak not again!"

"But—but——" began Mor Ag.

Hul Jok rose to his feet. In his eyes——

Lan Apo interposed, saved the situation:

"Hul Jok will hold *you* blameless, Mor Ag. As well punish Jon! It is the Moun-Thing's defiance, not yours. Transmit it, hurriedly, and you, Hul Jok, hold your wrath until

you have the proper cause of it within your reach!"

Hul Jok threw one great arm about Lan Apo's neck, bowing the slender boy nearly to the floor beneath its weight.

"Always I held you a flighty-minded youngster, Lan Apo," he rumbled. "But this time you speak with the wisdom of a Supreme Counceilor. For it I will hold you ever as a younger brother. Very near was I to violence upon the wrong object. I am myself once again. That message, Mor Ag!"

But despite his assertion that he held full control over himself, Hul Jok's face belied his words when the full purport of the evil Lunarion's insulting defiance dawned upon him.

"Tell that gigantic fool, Hul Jok," so the Moun-Thing had charged Jon the Aerthon, "that I have repaid him, and his fellow-fools, for their deeds against myself and my race. Tell him that I hold their women in the thrall of my will. Tell him that his woman stole, at my desire, his diamond Looped Cross of which he is so proud, as well as his own especial fighting-craft—the mightiest aethir-torp on all the worlds.

"Say to him that I know I am the last Lunarion in all the universe; but that with seven such women as I now hold——"

The remainder of that message is unfit to write!

HUL JOK'S face, as I have said, was a sight to behold—and quail from. His eyes, always aglow with the light of his proud, high spirit, now shone with a lurid, implacable wrath. His heavy black brows were drawn into a frown, ominous, lowering. His wide, full-lipped mouth was but a thin, grim, straight line, pallid and sinister. His entire features seemed at one and the same time to be convulsed and frozen into a mask of hate above and beyond aught I had ever dreamed could be depicted on any countenance anywhere. Not even the demons that, ages agone, dwelt in our Venhezian deserts could have looked one half so terrible as looked our haughty War-Prince in his consuming rage.

I state it truthfully—he frightened even *me,* and I had known Hul Jok since we played as children together. And when, after an heroic struggle to master his emotions, he finally spoke, the tones as they issued from his throat bore such dread menace that we all shuddered, friends of his though we were.

"My Hala Fau—*my woman!* A traitress? Sooner would I believe that Our Lady Venhez herself were false to her own planet! Nay! Hala Fau's will was overborne. That Lunarion devil! We did permit It to live too long. And now!

"But It shall not escape, though It flee beyond the furthermost limits of the known universe and into the Outer Voids—even there will I pursue It and exact such vengeance as no mind in all the worlds can now conceive. Aye! though I tear the Sun from its place and plunge the entire Planetary Chain back to what it was uncounted eons ago, into the limbo of Chaos and Old Night in order to do so!

"Not the Love-Girl of the lowliest Venhezian may be stolen without a frightful reprisal—it has been our Venhezian Law for ages—and shall it be told on the worlds that *seven* Love-Girls——?

"Hak Iri! Will-waft my command to every member of the Supreme Council and bid them assemble at the great Hall of Conference at the Central War Castle within one hour. Say that it is my imperative order. Add that I will slay with my own hand any one of them who comes one instant later than the given time! And you others"—he turned the full glare of his blazing orbs upon us who gazed spellbound at him—"do you prepare, even as

once before we made preparation, for a long spatial journey—save that ten times the quantities will be needed of all supplies. In two hours we leave Venhez—to return triumphant or—to return no more!"

WE HAD no trouble with our Supreme Council. Hul Jok is not the sort to request foolish things. And this time, even had his demands been folly absolute, one look at his grim face blazoning forth the wrath of his raging soul would have effectually nullified any opposition, had any been stupid enough to raise such issue. But the Supreme Councilors have common sense, and they were commeasurably angry at the stupendous shame done to all Venhez by that accurst Moun-Thing.

Hul Jok took barely a quarter of a Venhezian hour to set forth the case, and the Council took barely a quarter of that, again, to grant him, and us who were chiefly concerned, a free hand.

The only suggestion proffered was that we take a dozen aethir-torps of the Venhezian War Fleet, each fully manned and armed with the very latest in ak-blastors. But that proposal was rejected, flatly, by Hul Jok, who snarled:

"*One* Lunarion—and seven Venhezians whose women have been ravished away? Nay, Councilors; be the expedition ours alone!"

And we all were fully in accord with him in that.

So, as rapidly as could be done, messages were outcast to every known inhabited planet to be on watch for the great Venhezian aethir-torp *Victuri*. Albeit that was a superfluous measure, for never once was it sighted by watchers on any of the planets from Markhuri to Neptuan.

Yet we had no sooner descended to the courtyard of the Central War Castle and boarded the craft awaiting us, than we found that Ron Ti had preceded us and was already busily engaged in installing a queer-looking contraption. Still, it was amazingly simple in construction; and without it! . . . I shudder to think what might have been the outcome of our affair had Ron Ti's brain not held that appliance within its scope.

He had not completed his adjustments when with a *swoosh* we shot into air, and in no time at all we were hurtling into space. But hardly were we clear of the atmospheric envelope about our planet than he lifted the thing bodily—a square box it was, with a disk of Kalion atop—and set it where Hul Jok, standing at the controls, could see the disk without distracting his attention from his steering.

Perturbed and enraged as he was, Hul Jok, always profane, swore admiringly. For on the surface of the disk was depicted, shooting through the darkness of interstellar space, an aethir-torp, easily recognizable as the *Victuri*, the Standard-Craft of the Venhezian Fighting Fleet.

At the moment, it showed near the rim, at Hul Jok's left. With no explanation from Ron Ti, the giant Commander seemed to grasp the principle; for he deflected the nose of our aethir-torp a trifle, and the pictured quarry swung slowly to the center of the disk. Hul Jok growled his satisfaction thereat.

"Let that Moun-Thing escape us now, if It can," he exulted. And thenceforward that image, as well may be believed, was held exactly in the disk's center.

Once, seized with a brilliant idea, I asked Lan Apo, whose telepathic powers we all knew, respected, and trusted implicitly, if he could not contact with Kia Min. Of course, I remembered that, on that night when we had first become apprised that the girls were under the Moun-Thing's spell, he had stated that he could not do so any longer. But within me was the hope that mayhap that spell had

weakened, as the Lunarion might have his thoughts too much taken up with other matters to have time to devote toward holding the girls in steady thrall during their flight into space.

Well, Lan Apo tried it, but to no avail. Nor could he so with Hala Fau; nor with Alu Rai; nor with Ota Lis; nor Cho Als; nor with Esa Nal —although in that last attempt I had no faith anyway, knowing her as well as I did, and do! But so it was with the remaining victim of the Lunarion —the merry, laughing Lue Jes, Mor Ag's love-maid.

Yet the idea was not so foolish, after all. For Jon the Aerthon, who had accompanied Ron Ti from his laboratory, carrying the appliance we were even then using to follow our quarry by, and who had raised such a terrific *howl* at being left behind that not even grim Hul Jok had the heart to bid him stay—Jon, I say, once he realized why Lan Apo had laid himself flat on his back and closed his eyes, volunteered to do for us what Lan Apo admitted he could not accomplish.

Jon made his astounding offer through the medium of Mor Ag; and we all grinned a trifle derisively when Mor Ag translated. But Jon waxed insistent.

"Once I, and my forefathers for ages before me, were creatures of the Moun-Things' wills," he explained. "We became, inspired thereto by terror, accustomed to reading their thoughts, even when not intentionally directed at us; lest, did we fail to anticipated their wishes, divers inflictions might become our portions. So now, perhaps, I can make my mind think Moun-Thing thoughts——"

"Pity he could not have caught the Lunarion's thoughts before all this happened!" Hul Jok sneered.

But Ron Ti spoke up for Jon the Aerthon, reproving the giant Commander.

"That speech is unworthy of the great War-Prince of Venhez," Ron Ti asserted flatly. "As well accuse Lan Apo of the same thing—negligence. Or me——"

"Aye," Hul Jok made amends. "Best that I accuse myself for permitting the Lunarion to survive, what time we thought we had cleaned Aerth when we exterminated the rest of his hell-brood fellowship. Let the Aerthon try—and should he succeed, rich shall be his reward should he and I survive this expedition."

What filth poured from Jon's lips in a hideous babble of broken phrases, words, and even whole sentences, Mor Ag would never, either at the moment nor afterward, wholly repeat. But we ascertained from out the jumble, that the Moun-Thing intended dodging about in space for a while, then dashing direct to Aerth, and taking refuge in some subterranean retreat he knew of.

And for a single moment we exulted, but alas! prematurely. For we thought that, by steering direct to the Green Star, we could reach there first, intercept the stolen aethir-torp *Victuri*, and—then we realized that, should we attack it and destroy it with our ak-blastors, we would at the same time destroy our own Love-Girls who were aboard. Nor would the Lunarion Itself be injured by the disintegrating power of the ak-blastors, as we had found out long ago.

Then, worst of all, from Jon's lips, Mor Ag still translating, there came the final reason why we might not attack the Standard-Craft of the Venhezian Fleet. Namely, that it mounted ak-blastors superior in intensity and range over our present ones—and also, that, under imperative dominance of the Lunarion's evil will-force, our own Love-Girls would be compelled to work fighting-craft and destroying batteries of ak-blastors against *us!* And from what would ensue, because of such an affray, Our Lady of Venhez spare us all!

So we gazed at each other, wordless and hopeless, as full realization dawned in our minds.

Hul Jok, however, refused to stay long daunted. War-Prince of a planet, the one man to whom an entire world looked as leader and strategist extraordinary, it was but natural that his brain worked more quickly on such a problem than would ours.

"We must get to Aerth first," he decided. "Not too hastily, but we must be within its atmosphere when the stolen aethir-torp makes its landing. And we must land promptly thereafter, within seeing distance, yet remain ourselves unseen. Thenceforward we must even be guided by circumstances, until we, in our turn, can guide circumstances to serve our ultimate purpose."

IT WAS the same dull, lurid, reddish-glowing atmosphere, yet not quite so dense, as we had noted upon our first visit to Aerth, into which we drove headlong; but the surface of the planet, as we gazed upon it with mixed emotions, presented to our eyes the same deadly, drear monotony. Yet we had, vaguely, expected to see some signs of change; as to our minds, the Aerthons, once freed from their demoniacal Lunarion oppressors, should have immediately commenced to improve their degraded conditions. But, instead, things appeared precisely as when we had left Aerth the last time.

No birds in the air, no animals on the ground, and no cities of men could we descry. Only dull gray-brown dirt and sad-colored rocks, with here and there a dingy grayish-green shrub, stunted, distorted, isolate.

Naturally, a second visit would reveal the same familiar scenery; still, so depressing an effect did it have upon our spirits, that I can not but describe it again, even at risk of seeming to repeat, to some extent, my previously recorded statement of our former adventure.

But we did not land just then. That disk of Ron Ti's devising showed that the aethir-torp we awaited was as yet a considerable distance outside Aerth's murky atmosphere. So we put in several Aerth-days surveying the inhospitable surface beneath us for suitable places whereon to land whenever occasion warranted.

Whether or not the accurst Lunarion realized that It might be pursued was a question we debated frequently. But that, too, Jon the Aerthon soon resolved for us.

"Too big hurry," he stated decisively. "I caught the Moun-Thing's thoughts once more. Got good place, underground. Got whole race, men like me, to serve as slaves, to eat, if It pleases. Got idea to be King over all Aerthons, *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis*——"

This last we did not comprehend for a bit. But as Mor Ag questioned and Jon replied, we for the first time became aware that there was yet a terrible hell-brood left upon this unfortunate world—a race of beings sprung from the unholy union of Lunarions and Aerthons, yet quite different from either. And then Jon's concluding words drove us to frenzy afresh as he said:

"Lunarion think he now got fine chance to rule alone; and got seven fine queens——"

It was the final infliction. After that, nothing mattered but rescue for those we loved above ourselves, or—extermination for us in a group.

True, we bore the means of communication with Venhez, and did we call for help, not solely the Venhezian War-Fleet would respond, but unquestionably those from the other planets would join the expedition should they be needed.

But, as Hul Jok had told our Supreme Councilors, we held that seven Venhezians in one aethir-torp were fully adequate to deal with one Lunarion; and whose should be the delight of vengeance, if not ours?

And our thirst therefor was very great!

Then, even as we were discussing the affair for the hundredth time, and were far too much interested to be as watchful as we should have been, there came a lurid glare of light upward from Aerth's surface, and——

Our aethir-torp was out of all control! Worse, it was falling rapidly, caught, presumably, by the planet's gravitational pull. Soon its plane altered from the horizontal, the nose dipped, inclining yet more steeply, still more, clear to the perpendicular. Then the stern overpassed the upright—in a minute more we were falling, falling, whirling over and over, apparently in all three dimensions at once—over and over, and end over end, sickeningly, until——

Crash!

WHEN consciousness once again asserted dominance in me, I was aware, first, of a most terrific headache, and, secondly, of a full realization as to what had occurred; although how I knew it, I could not then have told, had I been asked. But to adhere strictly to the truth, neither can I now wholly account for it. Only —*I knew!*

Jon's statement that the Moun-Things had left a numerous progeny to still afflict the Aerthons was rampant in my mind. Also, I was assured that, apprised of what had befallen their progenitors, they had busied themselves, inventively, and were prepared, after their own fashion, to protect what they doubtless considered their own planet from further hostile invasion.

And we had reaped the benefits of their efforts. I was not bound in any way; so, despite the throbbing anguish in my skull, I sat up and attempted to see what sort of surroundings I had. But for a bit everything spun about so giddily that I could not believe aught I gazed upon. Then my head cleared somewhat and I could believe my own eyes—but did not want to!

There lay my companions, every one; and not one of us had on a single rag of apparel. Every particle of clothing gone, our blastors gone; and, for aught I knew to the contrary, gone likewise was our aethir-torp. Truly, we were in a mess!

Then Lan Apo sat up—and what that gentle youth said was almost sufficient! At least, it availed to awaken the others, one by one, Hul Jok last, oddly enough, considering his great size, prodigious strength and intense vitality. Wofully we stared about us, as well we might.

One comfort alone remained to us. After a hasty questioning, we were assured that, aside from minor bruises, bumps and scratches, we all were intact! But where were we?

Apparently in a cavern or other subterranean place. And what we saw in nowise exhilarated us. I say "saw," and I mean just that, for the place was illuminated by a light the source of which we could not determine, as it seemed to glow from walls, roof, and floor alike. Ron Ti, scientist as he is, commented at once upon that phenomenon.

"Cold light," he stated. "Wonder how they do it?" But as none of us knew as much about such matters as did he himself, no reply was forthcoming.

"They've quaint ideas of art," said Lan Apo, striving to put a facetious aspect upon our plight, and dismally failing therein.

"*Art!*" snorted Vir Dax. "Do you think those ghastly figures we behold all about us are but statuary? Deceive not yourselves. Once those were living beings! Obviously, after tortures nameless, unguessable to normal minds like ours, they have been thus preserved, *mineralized,* by some process best known to the race of underground devils who hold us here, in all likelihood, naked as we are, for like torment and a like preservation."

"Probably their Museum of Strange Beings," suggested Mor Ag, with deep interest.

But for my part, I simply stared in horror; although I wished to avert my gaze but was so hideously fascinated that I could not do so.

Staring, or shrinking in horror, however, did us no good. And Vir Dax—who is first a body-fixer, and afterward a Venhezian, as even his own Love-Girl said once upon a time—was wild with curiosity about those gruesome relics, even to the point of total forgetfulness of his, and our, peril. He rose to his feet, approached one, the most abhorrent specimen of them all, and ran his skilled hands over it, while a look of amazed incredulity overspread his usually immobile features.

"Ron Ti," he said, excitedly. "Come here! This touches your province quite as much as it does mine."

Ron Ti, the moment he felt the gruesome thing, nodded, saying in a surprized tone: "Metal—and Sclenion, at that. I wish I knew how it is done. Transmuting flesh to inorganic metal is beyond my scientific attainments. That I know!"

No one explained, for none of us could, and just at that moment something occurred which took our minds off an unprofitable speculation; for a faint slithering sound we heard behind us, and as we turned, simultaneously, we beheld——

Oh, none who have not *seen* one of the damnable creatures can ever wholly form a concept of, much less believe, the description of what we were looking at.

It had the head, shoulders, arms, breasts, and torso of a woman; and in a fierce, wanton way, its features might even have been called beautiful—by those admiring that type. For it had bluish-silvery hair—a snow-white skin with a slightly golden tinge shimmering over it; lips so darkly red that they held a purplish tint in their crimson; and eyes that were greenish-yellow with a lambent light aplay in their unholy depths. But from the hips down all resemblance to womanhood—as we know it—ceased. Instead of the bipedal form, it was a serpent agleam with iridescent armor-plate of scales as big as Hul Jok's thumbnail.

The lower, or serpent-part, was fully as long as was our giant Commander tall; but the upper, or woman-part, was small as any average ten-year-old Venhezian child. Yet it was anything except an infant, as was written plainly in its strange, disquieting eyes, wherefrom looked forth, unashamed, exultant, temptingly even, all ancient evil and original sin.

Its eyes played over us as we stood, appraising us openly, and I saw Lan Apo shudder as he read all too clearly the creature's thoughts. In a voice as silver-sweet as a love-flute's notes, she poured forth a stream of words in a language none of us understood. Yet Lan Apo——

Hastily I formulated a thought-wave and strained to will-waft it to him: "Do not betray your inestimably priceless gift of mind-reading! Later it may serve us well in time of extremity, if they know not of its power." And I felt immeasurably relieved as he nodded almost imperceptibly.

Realizing that her words were but wasted, she tried again, this time employing the tongue spoken by the Aerthon slaves, although she conveyed by her expression how repugnant to her notions it was to stoop thus. Even her voice sounded not so liquid sweet, but took on a harsher, raspier quality; more imperious, too, as if she found it needful to impress us with a sense of her superiority. Sensual, crafty, vain. Aye! that was it—vanity! I had a brilliant idea.

"Flatter her, Mor Ag," I said hurriedly. "It is her vulnerable point!"

"Toj Qul could do that better than I," he retorted. "But I will do my best."

"Translate to him, then, and, after, translate to her his replies," I suggested. "Act you simply as spokesman between them."

That devil-spawned Daughter of Sin was staring at us with rapidly mounting suspicion and hostility flickering in her glinting eyes.

"Speak quickly, Mor Ag," I advised.

"What would you with us?" he queried, bowing to her. I must say he did it well, for I saw a look of gratified importance gather on her wickedly beautiful features.

"From what world came ye here, O strangers: and why came ye here to this planet Aerth for the third time? Lie not; as well we know ye for those who once came, took one of our Moun-Lords away; came yet again with a mighty fleet of destroyers, and annihilated that godlike race who begot us, their sons and daughters. But fools ye were to come for a third time! And as fools ye fell by our arts! Now, why came ye this third time? Lie not, I say! That Jon, that renegade Aerthon slave ye took away and again brought with ye, has, true to his slavish nature, betrayed ye, in your turn. . . . "

"She it is who lies," muttered Lan Apo. "Jon has proved obdurate, and from him their questionings have elicited no gain."

She had noted the start of surprize we had all manifested at the mention of Jon's name, but evidently she thought it was because we believed her statement. So, with added confidence and more than a trifle of arrogance she awaited our spokesman's reply. But Ron Ti had been whispering softly to Toj Qul, meanwhile, so her questions were met with counter-questions.

"Tell us first, O Beauteous One, who and what you may be? Never before have we beheld your like, although we have visited all the known planets."

"Does that one ask?" And she pointed to Hul Jok. "Let him tell me I am beautiful and——"

HUL JOK leaped! Caught her by her slim neck, and squeezed, hard! Her eyes nearly popped out of her head. A slap from his huge, open hand sent her spinning clear of the floor, to bring up with a solid-sounding *thump* against the farther wall, to drop thence, limply, to the floor, where for a moment she writhed feebly, then became still.

Vir Dax bent above her, straightened up again, and shook his head, reassuringly.

"Not dead, but badly jarred, although no bones are fractured. She will live," he reported.

"So?" Hul Jok grinned, well pleased with himself. "We have had enough of this dissembling. Am I Commander? Then obey! Toj Qul, we need not your smooth tongue—you take too long to get results with your flowery phrases. *I* will question this—whatever it is; and do you, Mor Ag, translate with exactitude. Now! Lan Apo, is she shamming?"

The boy nodded. Then, warningly: "Have care, Hul Jok! Her *bite* is poisonous! Even now she meditates waiting until opportunity presents——"

I have seen that giant Commander of ours move quickly ere this; but never so swiftly as when that warning came. Not away from her who lay there supinely, but toward her!

She, too, had moved like a lightning-flash, but not—for all her serpentine qualities—quite quickly enough. And when our eyes caught up with their motions, she hung by the neck in Hul Jok's grasp, held at arm's length, where, despite her writhing and thrashing about, she was harmless. Twice she attempted to fling a coil about his arms or legs, but each time he *squeezed*, very

gently, yet meaningly, and she soon desisted.

"Now," he commanded, "you talk to her, Mor Ag. It is not needful to translate her every word. Just tell her what I say, and tell us the substance of her replies. First, who is she? and seeondly, has she any status or authority among her sort?"

Followed a volley of question and answer, until Mor Ag nodded his satisfaction.

"She elaims to be a princess, Idarbal by name—says that she rules, now that the Lunarions are become extinct, but admits that a sort of devilish priesthood styled the 'Wise Ones' exereise a drastie supervision over her entire race, herself ineluded. She herself is, according to her statement, daughter of a full Lunarion father and a mother but one-sixteenth Aerthon. Says that when the Interplanetary fleets invaded, only the full Lunarions were allowed to partieipate in the fighting. Their variously admixtured offsprings had been reared to luxury and debauchery, and had not, at the time, the proper warlike spirits nor the scientific training; as the Lunarions, normally undying, kept these matters as their own monopoly. They probably knew their spawn too well to trust them!

"But after the Moun-Things were obliterated, their progeny were obliged to do for themselves or perish at the hands of their slaves, the Aerthons. The great ealamity could not, of course, be long kept a secret. And, as soon as the tidings filtered down to the Aerthons, there followed one insurrection after another.

"Even now one is raging in the underworld eaverns. And this time the Aerthons are not only holding their own, but are making some slight headway. She says that the Aerthons have naught wherewith to fight save their swords, while her raee have light-projectors——."

And at that point Mor Ag broke off to smile at a grim jest she'd betrayed without realizing that she'd done so. As he elueidated, Hul Jok burst into a bellowing shout of laughter that frightened his eaptive worse than anything he'd so far done.

"You all will recall," Mor Ag's explanation ran, "that when the Lunarions attacked the interplanetary fleets with aethir-torps, following the destruction of their Selenion globes, they rammed a Satornian craft, completely wreeking it? Of course, the fragments fell to the ground. And the Satornians use an alloy of Berulion and Iron. Magnetie; yes.

"This hell-brood experimented, built light-projectors that attracted Iron and Berulion, believing that thus, should another hostile fleet ever hover over Aerth, it eould be *crashed* without any of the defenders being obliged to sally forth to do battle. Instead they could send out the Aerthon slaves to finish with their swords any who might survive. A most splendid scheme!

"Well, when these Aerthons started their last rebellion, an army of their master-race marehed against them, bearing as weapons small, powerful light-projectors intended to attract the steel swords from the very hands of their slaves. Another most wondrous scheme, but it worked altogether too well! The swords were attracted so violently that over half of the pursuing army were slain by a perfect rain of steel blades traveling their way at ineredible speed."

And at that explanation, we all laughed.

The Serpent-Woman princess stared in fear at us.

"What manner of beings are ye?" she demanded, quaveringly, of Mor Ag; "what manner, indeed, who, knowing your interplanetary ship is wrecked and your weapons gone, yourselves captive, naked, unfed, and facing the most ghastly torments ere ye die—if, indeed, ye may be slain—can yet laugh at a jest told by one of yourselves? Oh, release me," she

begged suddenly, abjectly. "I will struggle not against ye. I will not *bite!* Nay! I will *love* ye, all seven; will be submissive wife to ye, all! Oh, let me down, great Lord!" And she turned her pallid face and frightened eyes to Hul Jok with a look of appeal which needed no translating for our giant to understand.

Hul Jok, as Lan Apo nodded that she was sincere, very carefully set her down, giving her mute but emphatic warning against any treachery she might contemplate, by clenching his great fist and holding it suggestively within an inch of her nose.

Six of us snickered as she very humbly *kissed* that animate bludgeon. And Lan Apo, irrepressible as ever, cackled:

"She's beginning her wifely attentions promptly."

"If she's so anxious to please," said Hul Jok, "we'll make her tell us where Jon is."

"They've got him in a different cavern," she stated. "Not as yet have they tortured him. They so far do but question him, and he replies always that ye be actual gods from another planet which he insists is a part of Heaven, the Abode of the Blest; and that, ere ye depart from this world of ours, not one of the race of the Moun-Beings' children will ye leave living. Aye, great is his faith in ye. As is mine," she finished. And the glance wherewith she favored us did actually bespeak love—her sort—for us all! Very obviously, she was completely ours to do with as pleased any one, or all, of us.

For my part, I cared not a pinch of Cosmic Dust for her amorous glances, nor her too readily proffered caresses. But I realized, suddenly, that I was most abominably hungry.

"Make her get us some food," I suggested. "I feel empty clear down to my feet!"

Mor Ag explained, carefully, and Idarbal acquiesced immediately, seemingly delighted at the idea of serving us.

"But we'll have to let her go," demurred Ron Ti. "And," he added, "we may be sure she'll either not return at all, or else—she'll poison what she fetches!"

We all looked blankly at one another. But Lan Apo spoke up for her.

"You can not understand all her mental reactions, and neither can I. But she's sincere; actually in love with us, collectively. Probably for the first time in her life she's telling the truth without any reservations. She'll do precisely as she promises."

And with that we had, perforce, to content ourselves. That boy was never mistaken since he was born. Plenty of Venhezians would like him better if he would be mistaken once in a while!

So we stood and watched her glide over to one corner where was a little hole close to the floor—a hole so small that Lan Apo, slenderest of all us Venhezians, could not have thrust his shoulders into it had it been possible to save all our lives by so doing. But into that hole she slipped as freely as an aethir-torp might traverse interplanetary space. Nor was she gone for very long.

"Now I wonder why she came here alone? What could be her object in so doing?"

It was Ron Ti who made the remark, and Lan Apo replied:

"Simply female curiosity, abetted by hate. For we—in her estimation—are the actual murderers of her 'god-like' race, the Lunarions. So she came to gloat over us, revile us; anticipated the delight of seeing us tortured——"

"Never mind that," Hul Jok interrupted. "What we most need to know is: How did they put us into this cavern-cage? Not through yon snake-hole, surely. My fist would nearly suffice to stop that entrance."

Immediately we investigated, but no trace of door or other opening could we find. And while we were

busied in that futility we heard a silvery ripple of laughter, spun about as one, and stared at Idarbal who had returned.

Behind her were two attendants, likewise female, but quite evidently inferior in the racial scale to herself; for, whereas she was part serpent, and a gorgeously glittering one, they were lizard, from their waists down. Covered they were with a garish, unwholesome purplish skin, blotched unevenly with greenish-yellow spots as large as the palm of my hand. And even their features were lizardlike. Why, their very hands were those of lizards! The skin of trunk and arms and face was lizard. Only, as I have said, from their waists up were they shaped as she.

I heard Vir Dax mutter: "Oh for a free hand, a few sharp dissecting tools, and plenty of time!"

But even he, despite his scientific mania for studying grotesque mistakes of nature, was ready to eat. And we seven, our systems fairly shrieking for nourishment, gathered about our self-elected "mutual wife" avidly awaiting the food her attendants bore. They placed their burdens on the floor, unrolled a bundled skin, very finely dressed and ornately painted, spreading it out as a surface whereon to place the viands. Then they set before us various portions, both cooked and raw, *of an Aerthon!* Even the head was there, baked, yet easily recognizable!

It required many words before Idarbal understood that we did not care for man-meat, or that we would not drink blood instead of wine, though poured from golden bottles. And she only laughed at us when she did comprehend.

"But what, then?"

We explained that, coming from another planet, we could only assimilate the foods we had brought with us.

"All, everything, was saved and brought below," she stated. Something she said to her attendants. They obediently bundled up our untouched "feast" and departed through what Hul Jok had termed the "snake-hole."

IDARBAL was a strange compound of woman and demon, and for all that the demon mostly prevailed within her, still, she had her good qualities. I dare say it, now that the Serpent-Princess is no more; although Esa Nal will doubtless fly off the handle when she reads this and knows that I have so recorded my opinion.

Still, maugre Esa Nal's displeasure, I still say that Idarbal was wholehearted in her own queer way. For when the lizard-attendants returned they bore not only our own Venhezian foodstuffs and wine-bottles, but also—oh, priceless restoration!—our garments. Had they but brought our little blastors likewise! But as it was, we were immensely pleased. And Idarbal noted this and was commeasurably happy, so much so that she imperiously dismissed her attendants and then insisted upon waiting on us with her own hands. Meantime, between mouthfuls, we questioned her.

"What will your people do with us?"

"Like that," she explained succintly, indicating the horrors ranged on pedestals all about.

"How is it done?"

"Ask the Wise Ones," she shrugged. "I am the Princess Idarbal. It is no task of mine."

"No escape possible?"

"Where to?" Finality, futility even, was in her very tone.

"To the Aerthons?"

"They would kill me, your wife, as they would destroy, if they could, all my race. Am I a fool that I should help you so?"

"How were we brought here?" This from Hul Jok; one-idead as ever, where anything for our welfare was concerned.

"Never shall ye learn that from me!"

Lan Apo snickered almost inaudibly, and as one man we understood why! Nor did Hul Jok need any prompting. For the second time his broad hand slapped Idarbal into a complete coma!

Lan Apo rose to his feet, walked over to one of the metallized horrors, and indicated it.

"Tip it over," he ordered, and Hul Jok heaved with a will. As it overset, a yawning hole showed, slanting downward, whereat Hul Jok grunted his pleasure. Then his eyes lighted. He stepped to one specimen of gruesomeness, caught hold of its legs, one in each hand, and wrenched, twisted, and tugged until both came away from their jointures. The same attention he paid to the arms, and four serviceable clubs were the net result. Two more arms and another leg completed our weaponing. They were metal clear through, and correspondingly heavy.

With a grim and mirthless smile, Hul Jok caught up our somnolent "wife," wrapped her long nether extremity about her torso until only her white face showed, so making her into a compact bundle which he coolly tucked under his left elbow. Then, holding a metallized leg, the ankle gripped in his huge fist, he stepped to the edge of the downward-slanting hole and dropped into it, bodily. Apparently it was a smooth chute, for he vanished very rapidly.

One after another we each caught up food-bundle or wine-bottles, and followed our giant, sliding adown an unknown passage, to find at the end——

HUL JOK'S bellowing voice rose to meet me as I, following him, slithered and skidded downward—the old, wild Venhezian battle-cry, handed onward from forgotten eons back: *"Hue-Hoh!"*

I heard the *thud* and *crash* of his improvised war-club, a confused medley of rapidly moving, shuffling feet, and then a shattering, blood-curdling, screeching shriek that fairly *ripped* into my eardrums. And then I shot feet first into space, fell a short distance, staggered as I lit on a floor, and blinked as I beheld—whirled up my club, also a sizable, hefty leg, and jumped in to help Hul Jok as best I might.

That thing with which Hul Jok was fighting was a total reversal of the structural anatomy of the Princess Idarbal. It had an Aerthon's legs and trunks and arms; although instead of hands it had great claw-tipped paws at the ends of its wrists. And it stood nearly as tall as our giant Commander. Nearly as heavily built, too. But its head! Covered with tawny, reddish-yellow hair it was, with small, pointed ears laid tightly back against its skull. Brilliant yellowish-greenish eyes it had, glaring, yet *slitted;* a yawning cavity of a red mouth with long, dazzlingly white teeth—in short, it was, from the neck up, what the Aerthons later informed us was called a *"Lyen-Kat."*

Hul Jok was bleeding from a scalp-wound where the beast-man had clawed him with a slashing paw-stroke. I got in a whack at it, and was repaid by a lightninglike *rip* that left three blood-spurting lacerations on my left shoulder. As I spun about from the impact of the beast's blow, I saw Ron Ti shoot from a hole in a wall above me, saw him swing back his arm and hurl the bludgeon he carried, squarely into the man-brute's open mouth. For a moment, at least, that monstrosity's breath was shut off completely. It emitted a choking *gurgle,* clawing at the protruding club with both paws.

Hul Jok dropped her he'd been holding fast under his left elbow, grasped his leg-club with both hands and swung heartily.

Crash!

Never was skull made could withstand that! The way before us was unobstructed. Then, one by one, the

rest of our party arrived. An adoring voice behind us caused us to glance back at Idarbal.

"I *knew* ye were worthy of my love. Very mighty men are ye."

Hul Jok pointed to his victim, then shook his bludgeon suggestively her way.

"Mor Ag," he ordered, "tell her to guide us to where Jon is kept. We need that Aerthon. Speak, I say!" He reached for Idarbal, but she slitheringly eluded his grasp.

"Is no need, O Mightiest," she assured him, with a ravishing smile. "Shall not leave ye—fear it not. Enjoying myself too much with ye. If ye want that Aerthon-Slave, shall have him. Come!"

REALLY, it looked as if Jon would have a fit when he saw us. Oh, no! we had no trouble at all in locating him. Idarbal led us directly to where he was imprisoned. True, before the entrance of the cavern, wherein he was confined, was stationed another of the ugly Lyen-Kat guards, but the thing was attacked and slain before it even started to fight. It was dozing, half-asleep. And before it could gain an erect position, Hul Jok jumped squarely on the small of its back, landing with both feet. And Hul Jok's feet are no light matters. One smashing blow from his club, and the way was all our own. Idarbal chuckled.

"So it can not tell tales," she approved.

Jon started an excited gabble to Mor Ag, but Hul Jok put a stop to that waste of time.

"Shut that big mouth of yours, Jon, and come along," he growled.

Jon was too full of delight to obey for long. So he soon attached himself to Ron Ti and commenced giving him an earful regarding the Princess Idarbal, her sinful disposition. He said too much, in fact, for the Serpent-Woman caught at least a part of it, and became thoroughly enraged.

I was afraid the Aerthon, in his joy at finding himself again among us, his Venhezian friends, would blurt out something, in her hearing, about our actual mission there on that afflicted planet; but some Guardian Power must have inhibited his mind along that line until, through Ron Ti, I could caution him regarding the need of secrecy.

Hul Jok grew bored with trudging along one corridor after another in this subterranean maze, apparently getting nowhere at all. Suddenly his arm shot out and gathered the Serpent-Princess in its viselike hold.

"Whither go we?" he snarled menacingly.

"To my palace," she responded readily. "Is the one place where ye will assuredly be safe. So far ye have not met any of my people—only slaves who dare not tell of seeing ye, lest *I* be displeased. The time of the Moun-Festival draws nigh, and my people are busied in preparations therefor."

"This Moun-Festival," queried Mor Ag, his interest aroused in a new custom. "How is it conducted?"

As I am a living Venhezian, that Serpent-Woman shuddered in horror! Her face, even, turned a livid gray, and her vivid lips blanched.

"Thank whatever gods ye believe in that *ye* shall escape ever knowing how it is conducted," she whispered brokenly. "Those—*things* in that cavern where I found ye—they died—learning how we—worship the Moun! And, had I not given myself to ye, all seven, as wife, ye too——"

And again her great eyes expressed the awfulness of the untellable.

I think that we Venhezians have our share of boldness, but as we caught sight of Lan Apo's face we realized that he, at least, had correctly caught the thought-forms conjured up in her mind as she spoke—and we all felt sick from horror, too. We asked no more questions along that line. The details had suddenly lost all interest.

IDARBAL had stated that she was guiding us to her palace, wherever that might be, but after all, we never reached it. For then that occurred which changed everything for us.

Came a terrific jangling sound, much as if all the bells, gongs, and other sonorous instruments on all the worlds had all been tumbled together adown an immeasurable height to bring up with a dissonant *slam* at the bottom! Again—and yet again—until our eardrums ached in misery inexpressible. Hul Jok's bellowing voice sounded like an infant's *coo* as he demanded explanation. But Idarbal was as puzzled as were we.

"Never sounds *that* warning," she declared, "unless great happenings are toward. Yet I can not imagine. . . . "

"That Lunarion has landed," Lan Apo spoke up, confidently. "The thought-waves from her rejoicing race are so strong that even here, deep beneath Aerth's surface, I catch them plainly."

Hul Jok decided instantly on changing our plans.

"Tell that she-devil," he commanded, "to guide us to the Aerthons, directly, if she wants not her slim neck twisted until her eyes look down her own spine!"

That threat, I think, wholly disillusioned the Serpent-Princess Idarbal, changing all her self-aroused love for us into intense hate. That we should seek the Aerthons! It was too much! Her face betrayed her thoughts. Such utter, venomous malignancy I never saw depicted on any countenance before. Not even her Lunarion progenitor could have looked more virulent. Yet strangely commingled with her hatred was an expression of intense fear. She'd had several lessons which had inspired her with a wholesome dread of Hul Jok's inexorable nature. With a *swish* she shot ahead of us along the passage and so vanished around a bend. So fast she went that none of us, although we immediately gave chase, could overtake her.

"Ends *that*," snapped Hul Jok. "Now ahead, and fight our way."

"This place *I* know!" It was Jon, the Aerthon. "So, from here, I can lead to where are many of my people."

That *was* a relief. We all were pleased at that, Hul Jok especially.

"If we can contact with the Aerthons and form an alliance," he said, "mayhap we can yet upset this world and reshape it for its own good. Jon, how numerous are your people?"

And when Jon assured us that his people outnumbered the Yakshasin race by fifty to one, Hul Jok saw the possibilities even more clearly. As he put it:

"All that these Aerthons need is leaders in whom they can put full confidence, in order to regain control of their own world and again evolve to their former high evolutionary status. We were grievously at fault, long ago. We should have promptly returned here as soon as we eliminated the Lunarion Pollution, and helped them, instead of leaving them to their own devices. Now we have it to do, anyhow. So! This time there will be no turning away until our task is wholly accomplished."

He was right. In our hearts we acknowledged it. And felt inspired to do our best. Ron Ti added the final inspiration, were such needed.

"Great are the mercy and the wisdom of the Ineffable Power! Once were we permitted to become the instruments whereby Its will was carried out. But we, in our short-sightedness, did but half our work. Now will we, seeing more clearly, do the remaining half. So shall we acquire merit! Perhaps, even, we may yet regain our loved ones, unharmed."

And, somehow, thereafter, the outcome was never for a moment in doubt, in our minds.

How long it was we wandered in those infernal underground passages, following Jon's guidanee, before we contacted with the Aerthons, we had no means of knowing. But every last one of us was fairly aching with fatigue when we finally came into an enormous cavern, man-made, and found there a great crowd of them gathered. At first it looked as if we were due to be butchered by their long, sharp swords which they whirled in unpleasant proximity to our noses.

Jon shouted and cursed at them until finally they commenced to pay some slight attention. Well, we had a staunch advocate. Then we had two!

A gaunt, red-haired woman burst through the ring of menacing warriors, flung her arms about Jon's neck, embracing him with ardor. Plainly his wife! Few and terse were the words he shot at her, but they sufficed. She outyelled them all!

Very shortly, the long blades were sheathed, and we were eating, heartily, from our own supplies. Then we seven Venhezians and Jon the Aerthon held a brief eouneil, surrounded by a curious, staring throng of his people. Strategy those Aerthons knew not at all. Direct attack best suited their primitive, barbarous minds. But that, as Hul Jok promptly pointed out to Jon, was but a suicidal mania. Jon proved an apt pupil, grasped our ideas easily. Evidently, travel had broadened his mind.

"What first?" he queried.

"Explain in detail to your people how wonderful you think we are," Hul Jok ordered, regardless of all appearance of modesty or lack of it; for it was necessary to impress them thoroughly with our importance, if we were to use them as allies. "Then, when they are willing to follow and obey us, send out armed parties to capture—not kill—a number of your enemies, and bring them to us that we may question them."

Jon eaught that idea, too.

"And then?"

"We ourselves do not know, until after that has happened," Hul Jok admitted frankly. "Now we would sleep. Find us a quiet place, if such may be had. Then go among your people and do as you have been bidden. When you have several prisoners, awaken us that we may interview them. That, for now, is enough."

OH, THAT Ron Ti!

I learned, afterward, that he'd slept barely an hour; then, because he eould eonverse fluently with the Aerthons, he'd gone among them and made friends. Above all, he'd sought out their metal-workers, from whom he'd learned where their workshops were, and had been immensely gratified when he'd been told that none of the dominant raee did any aetual work, ever. That part they'd always relegated to the Aerthon slaves.

Learning also that, sinee the insurrection started, no one was in any of the shops, Ron Ti had taken an armed party of Aerthons and set out on a tour of investigation. As he told us when he returned:

"Little time have I for experimentation; but if all goes well, I feel certain that very shortly our Aerthon allies will have more potent weapons to their aid than their own sharp swords. Neither blastor nor ak-blastor can I produce; for the materials are not to be had, nor do I know where to seek for the proper minerals. But"—and his eyes lighted confidently—"I have found a number of light-projectors which do but need repairing to make them again effective, the rays from which will crumble rock, dirt, and metal to dust for a couple of thousand feet ahead. Evidently it has been by use of those that these stupendous eaverns have been hollowed out.

"Should our enemies attempt to use their death-ray projectors on our Aerthon allies whenever we do attack, those instruments, being principally of metal, will be promptly rendered useless by our Crumble-Rays. And, should they attempt to barricade themselves against direct attack, we can shatter their defenses faster than they can build them up. And at close quarters, the Aerthons with their sharp swords, being in numerical superiority——"

"It is absolute extermination, then?" Lan Apo asked, horrified, for he had caught Hul Jok's and Ron Ti's thoughts. "With all their outward defenses pulverized, their light-ray destroyers rendered powerless, these Lunarion-spawn, bad as they are, will be wholly at mercy of their Aerthon-slaves, and what that mercy will prove——"

"Little girl, be still," gibed Hul Jok. "Remember, this hell-brood you are wasting pity upon are but intelligent animals—or reptiles, rather—they are un-naturalisms; depraved; given to loathly debaucheries; unfit to survive; for whom is no place in a decent universe! Once we allowed one Lunarion to live. You, as well as we, now reap the consequences of that colossal folly. Do you, Lan Apo, advocate that we repeat our former mistake?"

The boy flushed.

"You are right," he admitted. "So let it be."

Certainly, it was war, unrelenting, ferocious even, and we knew we could tolerate no thoughts of mercy. Yet when the Aerthons brought in a dozen or more captives, as they did shortly, we could not but dread that which we knew must inevitably ensue.

Those captives were an amazingly queer-looking lot. There was one much like the Princess Idarbal in appearance, only bulkier from the waist up; evidently masculine. There were two who walked upright, had great, horny scales all over their bodies, had elongated heads, somewhat lizardlike save that upper jaws lifted as well as lower jaws dropped when they opened their mouths. And both sets of jaws were provided with long, white, spikelike teeth. One who stood erect had the head of a bird, beak and all, was covered with leathery skin, had long, cruel talons at ends of arms and legs—ugh! Monstrosities, every last one; yet fair examples, save in detail, of all the hell-brood begotten by their Lunarion parentage. For those who wish further knowledge of that now exterminate race of Yakshasins, there are the writings which Vir Dax has but recently completed, wherein he has gone to further lengths than there is space for in a brief narration of this sort.

"It sounds heartless, I know," Hul Jok told Vir Dax, grimly. "But *you* know bodies, brain, nerve, tissue, bone, muscle and blood as none other can know. So! I command you by that Looped Cross we all serve, that, should torture prove needful in order to make them talk——"

Vir Dax smiled vindictively.

"Apologize not, nor command," he said quietly. "It will be a pleasure—nor am I at all squeamish. I hope," he added emphatically, "that they will prove obdurate! Let you, Hul Jok, question that one, first." And he pointed to one perfectly gigantic fellow, huger than was our War-Prince himself.

The prisoner indicated had a face not at all bestial, structurally, although his expression, while denoting a high grade of intelligence, denoted also a most horrifically cruel disposition.

Question after question Hul Jok, with Mor Ag and Ron Ti interpreting, hurled at the captive. But all he would vouchsafe was that he was one of the Wise Ones, obviously a warrior-priest, and that he held himself too wise to tell us anything.

Vir Dax, in a voice which fairly *purred* with pleased anticipation, ordered them all, bound securely, to be laid flat on the cavern floor. Coldly, deliberately, with a short length broken from the pointed end of an Aerthon's sword, he tested each and every one for sensitivity to pain. One of the Crokhadyl-headed Yakshas proved to be the *least* sensitive; and I saw the cold eyes of Vir Dax light suggestively.

What followed, none of us Venhezians, except Vir Dax, likes to remember. Yet, ere that Crokhadyl-headed nightmare died, there was inspired in the others, who watched his gradually increased agonies, a most dreadful fear of that quiet, cold-eyed, gently smiling, softly moving Venhezian, Vir Dax—so much so, that whenever his eyes flickered in the direction of any one of them, that captive *winced!*

Very deliberately, as one who prolongs a delight, Vir Dax selected as subject number two that leather-skinned, birdlike monstrosity.

Its squawks of fright and anguish helped it not at all. Vir Dax went on as if he were accustomed to disarticulating such beings, still living, every day. Why, when he finished with that second specimen, and rose to his feet, even the Aerthons who had watched, shrank uneasily from meeting his gaze, and we Venhezians were shuddering with horror, Hul Jok not excepted.

And when Vir Dax bent above that "Wise One," who had at first defied us, the cold sweat of terror burst out all over his naked body, and he screamed, panic-stricken, as might any weak woman.

He talked! No question about it! Told us all we needed to know. Would have—had we permitted—turned against his own people and fought for us, would have betrayed them, singly or in a mass, into our ruthless hands, gladly, if only, he whimpered, we would keep that awful tormentor from even touching him!

Were I to set forth in detail all that he told us, it would use up too much space, and would be out of place in this narrative, besides. But, in effect, we learned that Lan Apo was, as usual, correct, when he'd declared that the Last Lunarion had landed. We learned that our Love-Girls still lived, and—joyous news!—were as yet unharmed; were safe, in fact, until the time of the Moun-Festival.

We learned, too, that, indirectly, we had our former "mutual wife," the Princess Idarbal, to thank for their immunity since the Lunarion had arrived on Aerth. For It—or he—who had intended making our seven Venhezian Love-Girls his queens, had promptly abandoned that idea from the instant he'd set eyes on Idarbal, who suited his notions even better. But she had stipulated as price of their union that the Venhezian women be given over to the Wise Ones as sacrificial victims at the forthcoming Moun-Festival.

"And this Moun-Festival occurs, when?"

Hul Jok roared his delight as our captive informed us that it was as yet nine nights off. And Ron Ti was equally pleased.

"They might fully as well give us a thousand years to prepare in," he chortled. "In seven days I will have every unarmed full-blood Aerthon provided with a good sharp sword. Us Venhezians I will equip with those repaired Crumble-Ray projectors I mentioned. Seven will be sufficient."

Hul Jok motioned to the Aerthons standing about us, and—well! Our remaining captives did not continue to survive; that is all! Nor, from then on, were any more captives brought in by the Aerthons. We did not need any.

Thenceforward, Aerthons and Venhezians alike became busy beings, hardly pausing by day or night, save to eat, hurriedly, snatch a wink or two of sleep, and again resume our labors. And daily and nightly, more and more Aerthons came in from remote caverns. . . .

And what were their Yakshasin master-race doing, all this while?

Feasting, reveling, indulging in every debauchery their depraved desires prompted, in accordance with their unnatural natures, and rejoicing, generally, over that stupendous miracle of all unexpected miracles—the survival and return of one of their "godlike" Lunarion begetters.

Oh, assuredly, they knew that we Venhezians were somewhere on, or in, their planet, and so had apprised the Lunarion himself. But they knew, too—or thought they knew—that we had naught wherewith to stir up trouble, save, mayhap, clubs or rocks. And they? Did not they have once again a Lunarion to guide and rule them? Plenty of time in which to attend to our ease, after the great Moun-Festival was ended. Then they could spare better the time to hunt us down, capture us, and hold us for the next one.

As Ron Ti had promised, the night of the seventh day found all in readiness.

We knew, because of what we'd learned from the Aerthons and from our captive Wise One, that the Moun-Festival was held in the great Temple of Lunarah, which was, in reality, but a vast, dome-shaped, hollowed-out hill, with a hole in its top which let in the direct Moun-beams when that orb, at its full, hung at its greatest height in the night skies. And we knew, likewise, that it was located on Aerth's surface in the middle of a broad, flat, rocky plain. As Hul Jok remarked, sardonically, when first we were told of it:

"What, for our purposes, could be more convenient than that?"

Even more to our purposes was it that none of the Yakshas or Yakshinis would be armed, during the ceremonials—aside from a lot of Lyen-Kat guards whose duty it was to surround the victims until the Wise Ones took them over into their clutches. So far as we could see, figuring ahead, it was nothing less than a slaughter we were planning—very unpleasant, but very necessary! Yet on one point Hul Jok waxed emphatic to the Aerthons. Which was:

"Every Wise One possible must be kept alive. I must have at least a dozen, intact! And that Lunarion I will attend to, myself. Wo to that Aerthon who disobeys me in this!"

But he needed entertain no worry along that line. The Aerthons were rapidly losing their fears of their Yakshasin master-race, thanks to Jon's excellent work in telling amazing yarns regarding the great prowess of us, their Venhezian allies. But not an Aerthon of them all but dreaded, with a dread unspeakable, facing one of the demoniacal Moun-Things again. They were only too willing to leave the Lunarion to Hul Jok!

Very early on that ninth night we seven Venhezians, each accompanied by a dozen Aerthons bearing the Crumble-Ray appliance of Ron Ti's finding, started upward to the surface of Aerth, and debouched on the rocky plain. And behind us swarmed hordes of armed Aerthons, fairly lusting for the coming fray. Long, heavy, and terrible was the account standing between them and their master-race; and short, sweet and final would the reckoning be! One look at the savage features, hate-distorted, was sufficient to vouch for that, the crowning proof being, were such needed, that they marched silently, instead of yelling, as might have been expected from hordes of barbari-

ans. But they took no chances of giving untimely warning!

Jon the Aerthon, who had developed marked ability as a leader, and who had in consequence won Hul Jok's unqualified approval, remained underground. He and that red-haired, screeching fury, his wife, in command of some two thousand Aerthon men and women, were to close every exit beneath the Temple of Lunarah, so that none should escape that way.

"Two thousand is too plenty," Jon assured us with a cheerful grin, and his gap-toothed terror of a wife added a reassuring smile of her own that sent cold chills running up my back.

Before the Moun had climbed halfway to the zenith, we Venhezians, with the Crumble-Ray projectors assembled and focused, were placed as Hul Jok would have us, and our Aerthon allies were simply a-quiver with murderous anxiety for the attack to begin. And we Venhezians were fully as anxious as were our allies, to tell the truth about it; only, we awaited the proper signal. Ironically enough, it would be our intended victims who would sound their own death-knell. That same jangling *crash* of dissonance we'd heard when the Lunarion landed, while yet we were wandering in the underground passages with the Princess Idarbal, would once again be sounded as announcement that all were present, and that the Moun-Festival was ready to start.

So we settled down and waited. There remained naught else to do. But finally it came. . . .

My Crumble-Ray projector slammed its viciously crackling brilliance against that hill the instant the first vibration of sound smote upon my suffering eardrums.

A shattering yell sounded behind me as the Aerthons rose to their feet and charged straight for the yawning passage I'd driven into the side of that damnable hill-temple.

One thing we had hardly figured on came into my mind and rather frightened me for a bit, although it was too late then to do anything about it, even if I'd tried. Which was, that with that enormous mass of hill being pulverized by the Crumble-Rays from seven projectors, what could save our Love-Girls from being smothered in the heap of dust ensuing? It was an appalling thought, and it brought the cold sweat of horror out on my forehead, albeit the night was warm enough.

But then I bethought me that even such a fate was more merciful than what awaited them during the ceremonials. And then I saw, with infinite relief, a huge, featherlike cloud of dust spout upward from the hole in the apex of the hill, and realized with joy that, with seven holes being driven inward with the speed of light, air was rushing inward too, as fast as the rays could make way for it; and that as soon as the shell of the Temple of Lunarah had been penetrated the combined air-currents had sought outlet through the opening at the top. Actually, the dust was spouting upward like an extremely active volcano.

Strictly speaking, there was very little fighting. It was, rather, even as we had anticipated, merely an overwhelming catastrophe for the Lunarion and the Yakshasin race. True, the Lyen-Kat guards died fighting valorously, and it must be recorded that they took nearly thirty times their number of Aerthons with them! But aside from that, the rest was but a butchery. Nine Wise Ones and the Last Lunarion were all that were left, some time before the Moun had reached that point where it had shed its cold light into the opening, bathed in its effulgence the naked, sacrificial victims, and so given the signal for their atrocious torments to begin; ere death gave the signal, in its turn, for their transmutation from organic flesh into inorganic metal.

I was inside practically as soon as our Aerthon allies. The work of my

Crumble-Ray apparatus was finished, and for all that Esa Nal had her faults—glaring ones, too; more especially a temper—still she, such as she is, is yet all mine; wherefore I had my own feud to settle, my own vengeful feelings to glut.

I'm not the smallest Venhezian on our planet, although neither am I a giant like Hul Jok. But—for close quarters I have learned to love a hefty war-club. And I had a fine one. Ron Ti had made it for me with his own hands. And it balanced splendidly.

The first trial I gave it was on an enormous Lyen-Kat guard. He made a sidewise swipe at me with something he gripped in both paws, a something that flashed dully through the swirling dust infiltrating the air, a something that fairly *sang* as it cleft the air.

Instinctively I sidestepped and lashed out, two-handed, with the plaything Ron Ti had devised for my enjoyment. It connected, satisfactorily, with the Lyen-Kat's nose just in alinement with its greenly glaring eyes—and I passed on, well pleased. A wonderfully sweet little toy I had!

Then a thing like a fat, white worm, erect, snapped at me with its slavering, pink mouth—and *squolched* to a filthy mess as I caressed it with my war-club. A snakish being flung a few coils about my legs, like lightning—and unwrapped itself much more rapidly as I reproved it by butting it in the abdomen with the head of my bludgeon.

A bellowing voice tore its way to my ears through the din and the dust: *"Hak Iri—to me!"*

I saw our gigantic War-Prince, armed with a great club, twice the size and heft of mine, striving to smash his way through a ring of Lyen-Kat guards, six deep, in the center of which I caught brief glimpses of soft, womanly, nude flesh. Our Love-Girls, at last!

I needed no further invitation. With a yell which would have done credit to Jon's wife at her best, I jumped to Hul Jok's side.

Those infernal Lyen-Kats were every one of them armed with long, thick metal staves surmounted by disks, convex on both surfaces, a *metar* in diameter, and sharp as knives all around the edges. Moun-symbols they were, but deadly weapons at close quarters. I saw one Lyen-Kat shear a bulky Aerthon clear through at the waist, with a single swipe. My club caught that same Lyen-Kat alongside of his ugly head at practically the same instant, and he sheared no more Aerthons!

Then, out of the top of my head, as it were—for both of my eyes were otherwhere busied in watching those shimmering, swiping disks—I saw a sight which made me gasp in amazed horror and dread.

Straight up, out from the center of that ring of Lyen-Kats, there shot into air, levitationally, the Last Lunarion! In his hands he grasped one of the Moun-disk weapons such as the Lyen-Kat guards wielded. Once above the ruck of the fighting, it made straight for Hul Jok, poised above him, and swung its keen weapon viciously downward at our leader's head.

Hul Jok must have seen that blow coming—apparently through the top of *his* head—for he flung up one arm, and caught that awful weapon just back of its *razhir*-sharp disk-head in his mighty grasp. One terrific downward *yank*——

Hul Jok hurled his ponderous war-club into the face of a Lyen-Kat and wrapped both arms about that "god-like" Lunarion. In his inexorable grasp the Moun-Thing turned a dirty leaden-gray from fear.

"In! In, I say, Hak Iri! To the Girls! I've *this* to hold!"

Then occurred the well-nigh unbelievable.

The instant the Lunarion went *gray*, his will-witchery spell over our Venhezian Love-Girls was broken!

I heard the clear, clarion voice of Hala Fau, Hul Jok's woman, ring out in the old Venhezian battle-chant:

"Hue-Hoh! Venhez and the Looped Cross! For Life and Love! Slay! Slay! Slay!"

Heard, too, the high, shrill voice of Esa Nal:

"Hak Iri! Hak Iri! *My Man!"*

Saw Esa Nal dive forward, catch a Lyen-Kat around the legs with her arms, spilling him to the ground. Saw Hala Fau stamp on the back of his head, jamming his ugly nose into the hard-paeked dirt floor, and, bending forward, snateh his disk-weapon from him, make sure with it that he would never attempt to regain it; saw her split with another blow the head of another Lyen-Kat—and saw *my* Esa Nal promptly equip herself and set to work like any old veteran of many affrays—which, in a manner of speaking, she was! *You* never—whoso reads—got into dispute with her. I have! Why, even gentle, tender, timid Kia Min, Lan Apo's Love-Girl, fought with a feroeity that out-vied any Lyen-Kat!

It marked the end. With seven thoroughly enraged Venhezian Love-Girls armed and athirst for revenge and liberty in their midst, the ring of Lyen-Kat guards was soon but a memory. . . .

NEVER could we ask aught from the Aerthons we could not have. Less than four days suffieed Ron Ti to erect a plant, crude, 'tis true, but powerful enough to signal Venhez. We knew, without awaiting reply, that a Venhezian War-Fleet was on the way to Aerth as soon as that message could be read.

The only way in whieh we could be sure that the Last Lunarion would remain innocuous, we adopted, cruel though it might seem. We turned him over to the Aerthon women and children to amuse themselves with. Well, they invented a new one! In a place where a cavern-wall was very thin, and formed a sharp corner, they bored several holes to the outer air, letting in sunlight, such as it was; shining ever into that Lunarion's face and eyes. Also, they had fire, and sword-blades, and took turns, continuously, day and night. . . . I do not think that the Lunarion's kingship pleased him. . . .

Vir Dax, Hul Jok, Ron Ti and I held sessions with those nine captive Wise Ones. At first they were stubborn, would tell us naught. But—Vir Dax, his methods! . . .

Finally Ron Ti nodded his satisfaction, and Hul Jok's blazing eyes were agleam with triumph.

"It is even simpler than I had thought," Ron Ti said. "I can do it myself—with improved variations. Even better in my Workshop baek on Venhez than I can here."

The Wise Ones, or what Vir Dax had left of them, we gave, likewise, to the little Aerthon children—the first playthings Aerthon children had had for eons past, doubtless. And the little imps certainly appreeiated their new-found sport!

Then, one morning, a hundred Venhezian fighting aethir-torps hurtled into Aerth's atmosphere and effected landings in such haste that the wellnigh infusible Berulion plates of which the hulls are made were red-hot almost, from atmospheric friction. And their crews nearly went *fran-tak* from delight when Hul Jok rated them soundly for careless—not to say reckless—navigating! But it was Hul Jok! And listening to his tongue-lashing sounded good to ears that had never hoped to hear his heavy voice again.

A hundred Venhezian aethir-torps. Six ak-blastors to each craft, and a crew of one hundred Venhezians aboard each one of the fleet, each carrying one of the tiny, deadly disintegrators—the hand-size blastors—and each man aehing to use his toy!

In another two days, poor, afflicted Aerth was truly clean. That hundred hundred Venhezians left not even a spider nor a toad, let alone those loathly *Blob-Things* we'd encountered on that first momentous trip of all.

Hul Jok, at request of the Aerthons themselves, left a dozen aethir-torps and a Venhezian sub-commander to govern, educate, and assist them until they became, in actuality, self-sustaining.

Then we returned to Venhez, where an entire planet went mad with delight. Not one Love-Girl of the lowliest Venhezian may be stolen without the most frightful penalties being exacted. . . .

MIDNIGHT! and in Ron Ti's great laboratory were gathered a silent, grimly waiting group. All seven of us were there, as were our lost and regained Love-Girls. Also were present all the members of the Venhezian Supreme Council.

The Last Lunarion was there, likewise. Caged again, in so narrow a space It perforce had to stand erect, and without ability to will-witch Itself out, this time. Never, since Hul Jok had *pawed* him out of the air above the fighting, back on Aerth, had the Lunarion lost his leaden-hued gray color of fear. Yet I do not think he really guessed how Hul Jok meant to deal with him; in truth, I do not think that Hul Jok himself knew the precise method he'd employ—until after he'd actually gotten his hands on the Moun-Thing.

Coldly, all emotion lacking from his heavy voice, Hul Jok, in plain, terse terms, explained to that fear-quivering thing in the cage that Its day of punishment had arrived—and why!

The Moun-Thing shuddered, whimpering, glaring out of its horror-haunted eyes at us who watched. Still, it tried to defy us:

"I can not be slain. . . . "

"True," assented Hul Jok. "Nor do we wish your death. . . . "

Ron Ti swung a lever over.

A stream of softly glinting particles from one of Ron Ti's queer mechanisms sprayed through the bars of the Moun-Thing's cage. The particles seemed to do It no hurt. In fact, for a moment It did not appear to notice what was happening. Then comprehension dawned upon Its consciousness. Although even then, none of us Venhezians who were watching, save Hul Jok and Ron Ti, fully understood.

The scintillant stream which flowed so softly, gleaming so *prettily,* was gradually impregnating that Thing in the cage, was turning Its entire body, *while yet alive,* to a statue of solid metal—impregnating it with Selenion, the Metal of the Moun!

The terrific transmutation was finally accomplished. . . .

O Our Lady Venhez! What a fate! Although metal, and thus immobile, *the Thing still lived—had consciousness!*

IN THE center of the great public square in our Venhezian capital city, Ash-tar the Splendid, there stands an enormous cube of inky-black rock. Atop of this is another cube, but little smaller, of crystal-clear glass. So clear it is, indeed, that air itself is scarce more lucid.

Imbedded therein, a sight for all to behold, is sealed forevermore that Selenion Statue which can not die. . . .

The Last Lunarion. . . .

Surely, the oath of Hul Jok was no light threat!

And Venhezian men and women—also those who at times come to our fair planet from other worlds—gaze thereon and turn away in the full assurance that nevermore shall the universe be menaced by the malignant activities of a pollution incarnate and unspeakable. . . .

A Bizarre Story Is

The Ninth Skeleton

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

IT WAS beneath the immaculate blue of a morning in April that I set out to keep my appointment with Guenevere. We had agree to meet on Boulder Ridge, at a spot well known to both of us, a small and circular field surrounded with pines and full of large stones, midway between her parents' home at Newcastle and my cabin on the northeastern extremity of the Ridge, near Auburn.

Guenevere is my fiancée. It must be explained that at the time of which I write, there was a certain amount of opposition on the part of her parents to the engagement—an opposition since happily withdrawn. In fact, they had gone so far as to forbid me to call, and Guenevere and I could see each other only by stealth, and infrequently.

The Ridge is a long and rambling moraine, heavily strewn in places with boulders, as its name implies, and with many outcroppings of black volcanic stone. Fruit-ranches cling to some of its slopes, but scarcely any of the top is under cultivation, and much of the soil, indeed, is too thin and stony to be arable. With its twisted pines, often as fantastic in form as the cypresses of the California coast, and its gnarled and stunted oaks, the landscape has a wild and quaint beauty, with more than a hint of the Japanesque in places.

It is perhaps two miles from my cabin to the place where I was to meet Guenevere. Since I was born in the very shadow of Boulder Ridge, and have lived upon or near it for most of my thirty-odd years, I am familiar with every rod of its lovely and rugged extent, and, previous to that April morning, would scarcely have refrained from laughing if anyone had told me I could possibly lose my way. . . . Since then—well, I assure you, I should not feel inclined to laugh. . . .

Truly, it was a morning made for the trysts of lovers. Wild bees were humming busily in the patches of clover and in the ceanothus bushes with their great masses of white flowers, whose strange and heavy perfume intoxicated the air. Most of the spring blossoms were abroad: cyclamen, yellow violet, poppy, wild hyacinth, and woodland star; and the green of the fields was opalescent with their colors. Between the emerald of the buckeyes, the gray-green of the pines, the golden and dark and bluish greens of the oaks, I caught glimpses of the snow-white Sierras to the east, and the faint blue of the Coast Range to the west, beyond the pale and lilac levels of the Sacramento valley. Following a vague trail, I went onward through the brushy woodland, and across open fields where I had to thread my way among clustering boulders.

My thoughts were all of Guenevere, and I looked only with a casual and desultory eye at the picturesqueness and vernal beauty that environed my path. I was half-way between my cabin and the meeting-place, when I became suddenly aware that the sunlight had darkened, and glanced up, thinking, of course, that an April

cloud, appearing unobserved from beyond the horizon, had passed across the sun. Imagine, then, my surprize when I saw that the azure of the entire sky had turned to a dun and sinister brown, in the midst of which the sun was clearly visible, burning like an enormous round red ember. Then, something strange and unfamiliar in the nature of my surroundings, which I was momentarily at a loss to define, forced itself upon my attention, and my surprize became a growing consternation. I stopped and looked about me, and realized, incredible as it seemed, that I had lost my way; for the pines on either hand were not those that I had expected to see. They were more gigantic, more gnarled, than the ones I remembered; and their roots writhed in wilder and more serpentine contortions from a soil that was strangely flowerless, and where even the grass grew only in scanty tufts. There were boulders large as druidic monoliths, and the forms of some of them were such as one might see in a nightmare. Thinking, of course, that it must all be a dream, but with a sense of utter bewilderment which seldom if ever attends the absurdities and monstrosities of nightmare, I sought in vain to orient myself and to find some familiar landmark in the bizarre scene that lay before me.

A path, broader than the one I had been following, but running in what I judged to be the same direction, wound on among the trees. It was covered with a gray dust, which, as I went forward, became deeper and displayed footprints of a singular form —footprints that were surely too attenuate, too fantastically slender, to be human, despite their five toe-marks. Something about them, I know not what, something in the nature of their very thinness and elongation, made me shiver. Afterward, I wondered why I had not recognized them for what they were; but at the time, no suspicion entered my mind—only a vague sense of disquietude, an indefinable trepidation.

As I proceeded, the pines amid which I passed became momentarily more fantastic and more sinister in the contortions of their boughs and boles and roots. Some were like leering hags; others were obscenely crouching gargoyles; some appeared to writhe in an eternity of hellish torture; others were convulsed as with a satanic merriment. All the while, the sky continued to darken slowly, the dun and dismal brown that I had first perceived turning through almost imperceptible changes of tone to a dead funereal purple, wherein the sun smoldered like a moon that had risen from a bath of blood. The trees and the whole landscape were saturated with this macabre purple, were immersed and steeped in its unnatural gloom. Only the rocks, as I went on, grew strangely paler; and their forms were somehow suggestive of headstones, of tombs and monuments. Beside the trail, there was no longer the green of vernal grass—only an earth mottled by drying algæ and tiny lichens the color of verdigris. Also there were patches of evil-looking fungi with stems of a leprous pallor and blackish heads that drooped and nodded loathsomely.

The sky had now grown so dark that the whole scene took on a seminocturnal aspect, and made me think of a doomed world in the twilight of a dying sun. All was airless and silent; there were no birds, no insects, no sighing of the pines, no lisping of leaves: a baleful and preternatural silence, like the silence of the infinite void.

The trees became denser, then dwindled, and I came to a circular field. Here, there was no mistaking the nature of the monolithal boulders —they were headstones and funeral monuments, but so enormously ancient that the letterings or figures upon them were well-nigh effaced; and the few characters that I could

distinguish were not of any known language. About them there was the hoariness and mystery and terror of incomputable Eld. It was hard to believe that Life and Death could be as old as they. The trees around them were inconceivably gnarled and bowed as with an almost equal burden of years. The sense of awful antiquity that these stones and pines all served to convey increased the oppression of my bewilderment, confirmed my disquietude. Nor was I reassured when I noticed on the soft earth about the headstones a number of those attenuate footprints of which I have already spoken. They were disposed in a fashion that was truly singular, seeming to depart from and return to the vicinity of each stone.

Now, for the first time, I heard a sound other than the sound of my own footfalls in the silence of this macabre scene. Behind me, among the trees, there was a sibilant rustling followed by a faint and evil rattling. I turned and listened; there was something in these sounds that served to complete the demoralization of my unstrung nerves; and monstrous fears, abominable fancies, trooped like the horde of a witches' sabbat through my brain.

The reality that I was now to confront was no less monstrous! There was a whitish glimmering in the shadow of the trees, and a human skeleton, bearing in its arms the skeleton of an infant, emerged and came toward me! Intent as on some ulterior cryptic purpose, some charnel errand not to be surmised by the living, it went by with a tranquil pace, an effortless and gliding tread, in which, despite my terror and stupefaction, I perceived a certain horrible and feminine grace. I followed the apparition with my eyes as it passed among the monuments without pausing and vanished in the darkness of the pines on the opposite side of the field. No sooner had it gone, than a second, also bearing in its arms an infant skeleton, appeared and passed before me in the same direction and with the same abominable and loathsome grace of movement.

A horror that was more than horror, a fear that was beyond fear, petrified all my faculties, and I felt as if I were weighted down by some ineluctable and insupportable burden of nightmare. Before me, skeleton after skeleton, each precisely like the last, with the same macabre lightness and ease of motion, each carrying its pitiful infant, emerged from the shadow of the ancient pines and followed where the first had disappeared, intent as on the same cryptic errand. One by one they came, till I had counted eight! Now I knew the origin of the bizarre footprints whose attenuation had disturbed and troubled me.

When the eighth skeleton had passed from sight, my eyes were drawn as by some irresistible impulsion to one of the nearer headstones, beside which I was amazed to perceive what I had not noticed before: a freshly opened grave, gaping darkly in the soft soil. Then, at my elbow, I heard a low rattling, and the fingers of a fleshless hand plucked lightly at my sleeve. A skeleton was beside me, differing only from the others through the fact that it bore no infant in its arms. With a lipless and ingratiating leer, it plucked again at my sleeve, as if to draw me toward the open grave, and its teeth clicked as if it were trying to speak. My senses and my brain, aswirl in gulfs of hideous terror, could endure no more: I seemed to fall and fall through deeps of infinite eddying blackness with the clutching terror of those fingers upon my arm, till consciousness was left behind in my descent.

When I came to, Guenevere was holding me by the arm, concern and puzzlement upon her sweet oval face, and I was standing among the boul-

ders of the field appointed for our rendezvous.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Herbert?" she queried anxiously. "Are you ill? You were standing here in a daze when I came, and didn't seem to hear or see me when I spoke to you. And I really thought you were going to faint when I touched your arm."

The Serpent in Eden

A LEADING zoological question which was discussed with great zest from two to four centuries ago was that regarding the species of serpent which misled Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. The general belief was that it had stood upright, because its sentence of punishment, as given in the Bible, was to crawl on its belly for the remainder of time. Some medieval authorities insisted that the serpent (generally admitted to be Satan in disguise) had a woman's face while talking to Eve, in order to win her confidence; and it is so pictured in several old books. Others thought it was that mythical serpentiform animal, the basilisk.

Sir Thomas Browne, the Seventeenth Century philosopher, says that Julius Scaliger (1484-1558), "speaking of certaine strange kinds of serpents, reports that in Malabar there are serpents 8 foote long, of an horrible aspect, but harmless unless they bee provoked. These he calls boy-lovers, for that they will for many houres together stand bolt upright gazing on the boyes at their sportes, never offering to hurt any of them. These, saith he, while they glide on the ground, are like other serpents or eeles, but raising themselves upright, they spread themselves into such a corpulent breadthe, that had they feet they would seeme to be men, and therefore he calls them by a coigned name, eele-like men." From this description Browne supposes that this must have been the kind of serpent that spoke to Eve.

Dr. Adam Clarke (1762-1832) argued that it was not a serpent at all, but an ape—his contention being that the Hebrew word *nachash* in *Genesis* III, 1, is nearly the same as an Arabic word which means not only an ape, but the Devil! Dr. Clarke pointed out that whatever the *nachash* was, in intelligence and reason it stood at the head of the lower animals, that it evidently walked erect, and that it possessed the gift of speech, which he apparently conceives that apes once possessed.

There was also much wrangling over the question whether the forbidden fruit was really an apple or not, some claiming it was a pomegranate, others a sort of melon. One Matthiolus described it as *Pomum Adami*, or Adam's Apple, a tropical fruit somewhat like a citron, but with deeper, rougher corrugations on the skin, which represented the marks of Adam's teeth, still inherent in the fruit.

THE FATES

By JOHN DWIGHT

"With a shriek Lippo broke away."

"NO, SORRY, sir, but I can't go to the British Museum with you—there's a tradition in our family against it."

One foot was on the step of a bus, the other on the curb of Oxford Circus as I stopped and looked at my companion, my jaw hanging open.

"H'are you comin' or h'aren't you?" snapped the conductor as a whistle blew and the bus began to roll forward.

I replaced my left foot on the Oxford Circus curb and faced around squarely. As long as I had known him, for some twenty-five years, I had never known Foster Kenmore to be anything but the most ordinary young American. To hear of a family tradition against the British Museum was preposterous.

"My boy," I took his arm firmly in mine, "you're crazy. Will you please tell me what you mean?"

It was several minutes before he could tell me. Oxford Street at Oxford Circus is not one of the more simple streets to cross, and that particular afternoon the traffic was occupying the efficient attention of three white-helmeted bobbies. A break finally came and we crossed to stroll slowly down Regent Street.

"Will you please tell me what you mean?" I repeated.

For one of the few times in his self-possessed young life I saw him embarrassed.

"It—it really isn't anything. It's —well—just that I'd rather not go."

I took his arm still more firmly. "Foster, I am not entirely a fool. One of the reasons I brought you abroad as my companion was so that I could have one to whom I could pour out my emotions over the Elgin Marbles or the Mona Lisa. Here at the very outset you fail me. There is more to this than appears. In about five minutes, Foster, if we can successfully negotiate this scaffolding farther down the street, we will reach the Piccadilly Hotel. The Piccadilly bar is as comfortable as any other place to pass the afternoon and the Piccadilly sweet Martinis are not to be despised, even in this land of plenty. So, Foster, my boy, you have just five minutes to compose your thoughts and arrange facts and events in their chronological order."

To tell the truth, I was rather annoyed at this notion of Foster Kenmore's. As I had said, I had brought him with me half as a companion and half as a pupil; for there is nothing I enjoy so much as showing the wonders of Europe to some young and intelligent American. I had known Foster since he was born and had never found him anything other than an average lad, though perhaps a bit above the average in brains and sensitiveness. In fact, I had known his father, and my father had known his grandfather. They had both moved into the new, Middle-Western town at about the same time; and while my father had gone into real estate, Foster's grandfather had opened a corner store. Well, you know, in America to know about anyone's grandfather is usually a guaranty of both lineage and respectability. I come abroad about every other summer and always bring some young fellow as a companion who would probably never get across any other way. I had always liked Foster Kenmore and was much pleased when he had been able to come this time. So far he had been more than satisfactory—but now this sudden vagary! Was he going to object to all museums on the ground of a family tradition? I had to admit, however, the excuse was original.

THE Piccadilly bar was cool, dark, and deserted, the leather chairs were comfortable, and the sweet Martinis reached expectation. After the second I motioned the waiter away and turned to Foster.

"Now, Foster, tell me. I am an old friend of your family's, you know; anything you say will be confidential, of course. I really think you owe me an explanation."

He sank a bit lower in his chair. His blue eyes were troubled and his cheeks were flushed, whether from the Martinis or embarrassment I could not tell. Even his usually sleek hair was mussed. I don't remember what I was prepared for, but it certainly was not for what I heard.

"It really isn't anything much, sir, but I'll tell you all I know about it from the very beginning. My family is really Italian——"

At that I jumped. For three generations at least they had been Americans. No one ever had thought to go farther back than that. They certainly did not look foreign. But Foster Kenmore was continuing.

"Of course we've been in America for a long time, so we really are Americans and have lost any Italian traits we may have had. You see, we first came over about 1697. I'll start as far back as I can.

"Our family originally came from Venice and our name was Conmorroni. We were probably very poor, for we were just common people and most common people were poor. In fact it is thought that my seven greats grandfather worked as an apprentice in an iron foundry. His name was Lippo. It all really starts

in 1687. Venice was still fighting Turkey, you know. Francesco Morosini had been appointed commander of the fleet again in 1684. In March, 1687, he was back in Venice fitting out another expedition, this time against Athens, a Turkish stronghold. Somehow my grandfather joined the fleet. Whether he enlisted in youthful enthusiasm (he was about twenty), or whether he was conscripted, we do not know. Anyway, in May, 1687, he became a gunner on the flagship. The fact that he became a gunner so soon after his joining is the only foundation for the theory that he had worked in a foundry—and it isn't a very good one, is it? Well, the fleet sailed away (I'm most awful anxious to see Venice, sir, it's what I really want to see most in Europe) and my grandfather with it.

"Apparently nothing much happened until it came to September and the bombardment of Athens. Of course you know all about the Greek who escaped from the city, came to Morosini and told him of the powder magazine in the Parthenon. Morosini ordered the guns of his ship trained on the Parthenon. Guns weren't all they might have been in the way of accuracy in those days, and it was a long shot; so he offered ten ducats to the gunner who blew up the magazine. I don't believe he ever thought of the fact that he was also blowing up the Parthenon, and I know Lippo never did. He just wanted the ten ducats. For perhaps an hour the shots were unsuccessful, fairly close, but nothing remarkable. It was my grandfather's third turn—apparently everyone took turns. As he aimed, something told him not to fire, but he did. Rather calmly he watched the shot go. He knew what would happen. His shot landed squarely in the middle of the Parthenon. There was a blaze and a roar, and the Turkish powder magazine was no more. He was led before the great Morosini, who with his own hand gave him the ten ducats and praised his aim. But Lippo had a feeling it would have been just as well if he hadn't earned those ten ducats.

"A few days later the Venetians invested Athens, and Lippo was with the landing party. When the Turks had been finally cleaned out the men were free to do pretty much as they wanted. But instead of looking for a wine-shop or a pretty girl with the others, my grandfather was drawn up to the Acropolis—it seemed the only place for him to go.

"It was late afternoon and the sun was nearly setting. The air seemed brighter and clearer than ever. He could easily pick out the red lion of St. Mark on the flags of the Venetian ships in the harbor, and down below in a little square he could even see the blood on the blades of four Italians who were still going about the enjoyable business of hunting Turks. It was curiously still on the Acropolis. The sun tinted all the marble temples to a hot gold. He picked his way around shellholes and over marble columns until he reached the Parthenon. He seemed to be the only person there; at least he heard no one and felt appallingly alone.

"He stopped to look at the Parthenon. Even though he was used to the beauties of Venice, the gorgeousness of St. Mark's, the stately palazzos, there was something in this severe loveliness which quite took his breath away. The northwest façade was only partially injured, so he saw much more of the pillars, the metopes, the frieze, the pediment, than has ever been seen since. Then he walked around to the southwest side to see what damage his shot had done. It had blown out a great section of that wall, you know, utterly destroying it, as well as part of the other. No one knows what was on that particular part of the frieze, too. He was rather dismayed at the damage; if he had known what it was he

was destroying he would never have fired the shot. But he was a bit impressed at the size of the hole.

"'And my shot did all that!' He didn't realize he was speaking aloud.

"'You are the man who fired the shot which destroyed the Parthenon.'

"He had thought he was alone. Half-frightened, he wheeled around. Standing among the debris of the pillars and roof were three old women. They each carried something in their hands besides a cane, he thought, but he was so terrified by their look of age as well as the hatred in their little black eyes that he could notice nothing else. They were the oldest things he had ever seen. The thought of how old they must be and what they must have seen and known made him shudder. Their hair was gray, straggling, and lifeless; their skins were a dull gray and as full of wrinkles as a cracked marble tile; their hoods and cloaks were gray and moldy. But their eyes were black, alive, and filled with a very intense hatred. And they were standing between him and the path to the town where lay safety. He tried to back away, but a drum of one of the great pillars was behind him and he could only stand with his hands pressed against the cold marble, which had suddenly become clammy to his moist hands. The sunset light was turning from gold to orange.

"It was the first one, the one nearest him, who had spoken. The second one took up her words: 'You are a Venetian. It was your shot which blew up the powder, blew up the roof, and blew out the walls.'

"The third went on: 'You are the man who destroyed the frieze, and the figures on the frieze.'

"Their voices sounded like dried leaves rubbing together, quite faint, now crisp, now soft as though there were mold on them.

"Lippo could not speak; he did not even try. He could only nod. He hadn't meant to nod, but it was a physical impossibility to lie to these three horrible old women.

"The first one began again: 'You have destroyed the Parthenon. The Parthenon shall destroy you.'

"The second merely stated: 'You shall be destroyed.'

"But the third was more explicit: 'You destroyed the many figures of the Parthenon frieze. The remaining figures of the Parthenon frieze shall have revenge. They shall destroy you.'

"The light turned from orange to blood-red. The marble fragments looked dipped in blood. Even the deathly gray skin of the old women took on a ghastly pink.

"The third one repeated in a deeper tone: 'They shall destroy you.'

"With a shriek Lippo broke away from their baleful glare, rushed between them and down the path toward the city. As he reached the edge of the Acropolis he looked over his shoulder to the Parthenon. The light had faded to a dull gray, and there was no one to be seen. That seemed to terrify him all the more, and he didn't stop running until he reached the shore and a boat to take him back to his ship.

"He never set foot in Athens again. He was afraid of the three old women and their curse. In fact, he never even went back to Venice; he seemed to hate blue skies and bright sunlight—anything that might remind him of Athens. He went north and settled in Holland. That was different enough, but he felt as though he were still too near the Parthenon and the old women. He took ship to America and landed at New York. There he married and settled down. He told his wife all about it, quite frankly, and later his children. He took to reading Greek mythology and became convinced that the three women were the Parcæ, the three Fates. He had outwitted them, but he was not so certain for his children. He warned them never to go to

Athens, never to go near the Parthenon or anything that had anything to do with the Parthenon.

"His son changed the name from Conmorroni to Kenmore, for business reasons, and his son moved west. The children were always told the story; no one else ever knew, but it was told them over and over again."

"Is that all?" I asked as Foster Kenmore paused in his narration.

"Not quite," he answered slowly. "Of course I don't believe it all; my respected grandfather was probably suffering from a case of nerves or land-sickness. But then, there is the story of my great-uncle John. It's quite short; I won't bore you much longer."

He squirmed a bit in his chair as though he didn't enjoy having the family curse brought so near to him. The dusk in the room was steadily deepening, and behind me I could hear two men discussing Cowes and the regatta.

Kenmore went on: "He was a sailor; in fact he ran away from home to be one. Eventually he rose to be captain and went down with his ship off Hatteras in '88. But when he was quite young, about twenty-five, he was just an ordinary third mate. On one trip his ship docked at London. My uncle was fairly well educated and so was the second mate, and while the others were drinking up their shore leave, John and the second mate would go sight-seeing.

"One afternoon they entered the British Museum. He knew nothing about the Elgin Marbles—had never heard of them. As soon as they went in, John felt that he ought not to have come; but while he was still wondering why, he turned to the left, and without knowing what he was doing, led the way straight to the Elgin Marbles. He reached the door of the room and stopped. His brain and his heart were telling him to go away as fast as he could, but something stronger, more intangible, was calling him in. He took one step inside, turned, and tore past the second mate, past the guardians, and out into the street.

"The mate followed. 'What's the matter, John?' he asked. 'Why are you acting so queerly?'

"John caught his breath. 'Those things—in that room—come—from the—Parthenon—at Athens.'

" 'They don't. You're crazy.'

" 'They do. I know. I could feel it.'

" 'You're getting crazier. I'll go and ask the man in there; he ought to know.'

"He returned in five minutes, his face sober. 'You're right; the things in that room do come from the Parthenon; they're part of the frieze Lord Elgin brought to England. How'd you know?'

" 'I could feel it,' answered my uncle weakly. 'They would kill me if they had a chance. It's death to go near them. Let's go back to the ship.'

"After that my uncle would never go to London or even to England. He said he was drawn toward that room by a blind, implacable hatred which was like a black blanket enveloping him. It caught him so off his guard that it could very nearly do as it liked with him. He didn't mind dying, but he didn't like the idea of being killed by those statues without heads or hands. One thing he never understood: it was how he escaped. If fate, or whatever it was, was strong enough to draw him there it was strong enough to kill him; yet he had escaped. He decided it must have meant that the time for vengeance had not yet come. Before that he hadn't believed the family legend, but after that he did believe it.

"That's all there is to tell, sir. It isn't so much, you see. When you said 'British Museum' I just automatically said I couldn't go. But now I think perhaps I'd better. I

don't believe all this tale, really, and it wouldn't be right to have a few broken marbles get the better of you in any way. I'll go any time you want, sir."

I laid a hand on his arm. "No, you won't. The story has been very interesting and I thank you for telling me. I can't say I believe it all; but anyway, it's just as well to let sleeping dogs lie. As long as you're with me you won't go to the British Museum. It doesn't pay to mix up with things you don't understand. I was getting tired of town anyway. We leave for the Lakes tonight, then to the Trossachs, and perhaps up to Strathpeffer for a bit of fishing. Come on, let's pack." And I led him out to a 66 bus and the Hotel Cecil.

You see, I didn't want to run any risks with this lad. As far as I knew he was the last of his family. I owed it to his parents to bring him home safely. As I had said, I didn't believe it all; but there's no use running risks.

We spent only a few days at Keswick; the scenery was too tame and too tourist-spotted. Fishing wasn't very good in the Trossachs—too many tourists lumbering about; but up by Strathpeffer it was great and we spent a week there. We stopped a few days at Edinburgh and came down leisurely through the cathedral towns to Cambridge. It was somewhere between Cambridge and London that Kenmore first referred to the family curse again.

"Do you know, I've been thinking I ought to go and see the Elgin Marbles, sir. If it's a curse, why, it's time it was removed; and the only way to remove it is by going to the Parcæ, or whatever it is, and proving that it's all bunkum. If there isn't a curse, why, I ought not to miss seeing them. I think I'll go tomorrow."

"Foster," my tone was very definite, "I don't want any more of this foolishness. Of course I can't forbid your going, but I advise strongly against it. In fact I ask you not to, as a favor to me. Besides, you won't have much time; we have to go to the Tower again, and the Abbey; you haven't seen Hampton Court, and there are several churches you ought to see, such as St. Bartholomew the Great, just because the average tourist doesn't. We fly to Paris next week, so your time is short. Don't think anything more about it."

But I could see he was thinking about it. It was becoming a kind of obsession with him: it was up to him to go and remove the family curse.

I kept him pretty busy for three days, then he came to me again.

"Really, I think I must go and see those marbles. It's so foolish not to. Besides, I want to see the Rosetta Stone and the Portland Vase. I don't like being cheated out of them by a grandfather's attack of conscience or an uncle's attack of D. T.'s. How about this afternoon?"

"Impossible! We are going to Oxford, and as it's a full half-hour to Paddington Station we'll have to hurry. I want to walk in John's Gardens and see Magdalene Cloisters again and see if the ivy has quite hidden Pembroke. Sorry, but there's no time for the British Museum."

The next day was Sunday and Lord Lanfield had asked me to tea. He was only a casual acquaintance or I would most certainly have taken Kenmore with me. As it was, I left him absorbed in the Meissoniers at the Wallace Collection and under strict promise to return to the hotel at 5 and attend to some correspondence for me.

It was a dreary day, dismal and gray as only a rainy Sunday in London can be. The tea was comforting, the fire friendly, Lord Lanfield more charming than ever; and we discovered a common passion for Italian stilettos. His collection

was truly remarkable, and it was nearly 7 when I hurried into the hotel. Kenmore was not there. According to the elevator boy he had not been in all afternoon. For a moment I could not think where he could be. The museums close at 6. He might have gone to the Trocadero for tea, but 7 was late even for the Troc. And then I remembered the British Museum.

There was a cab-stand near the hotel, but it took us ten minutes to get to the museum because of a traffic jam at Holborn Circus where a bus had skidded. The front entrance was closed, but I hurried around to a little side door I knew the guardians used. As I reached it a taxi drove up, and a doctor with the usual bag got out.

"What's the matter?" I grabbed his arm. "Who is hurt?"

He was rather surprized to see an elderly American with no hat speaking to him in this agitated manner over something that did not concern him, but he answered courteously, "I do not know. A call was sent to me from the museum about 6:30, but I only reached home five minutes ago. They did not say what was the matter."

The vagueness disturbed me further. "May I come, too? I have lost a young friend and I fear he is in the museum—and—ill."

He looked at me, then agreed even more courteously. The side door opened and an under curator, torch in hand, ushered us in.

"It's a young fellow, sir," he said in answer to the doctor's query. "He came in about 4:30. Tom was at the gate and he says the fellow asked the way to the Rosetta Stone and the Portland Vase, same as everyone else. Tom told him how to go, and he went upstairs to the Vase. Milburn, the special guard in the Gold Room, says he came in sometime about a quarter to 5 and spent quite a bit of time there looking at the Vase and the cameos and cut gems. He went out through the Greek vases toward the Egyptian section. No one else remembers seeing him. There have only been a few people in this afternoon, which is probably the only reason why he was noticed at all. You could have spent nearly half an hour alone in some rooms without being interrupted, which is very unusual.

"We cleared all the people out at 6, and except for a woman who said she didn't get her own umbrella, everything was as usual. At 6:30 Upson, one of the night guards, was going through the Elgin Room when he thought he saw something behind the piece of the northwest pediment in the center of the room. He went to see, and it was this young man. He sent for me and we 'phoned you. I think he's fainted."

We had been hurrying down dark corridors, past gloomy, unfamiliar shapes and forms, up steps, until I was quite lost. And all the time my brain was saying, "You should have kept him with you. You should have kept him with you." At last we saw a light and I recognized the sunken room with the fragments of the great quadrata. And we came to the door of the Elgin Room.

The lights were on and three guardians were grouped around a figure lying on the floor. Of course it was Kenmore. I had known so all along. One of the men was trying to pour whisky into his mouth and another was rubbing his wrists.

"Here's the doctor, men," came the curator's low voice.

They moved aside, and the doctor knelt by Kenmore. I leaned against the wall: I knew what he was going to say.

"He's dead," muttered the doctor finally.

"But it's impossible!" The curator

knelt beside him. "What did he die of?"

"Well—I suppose it's really heart failure; his heart must have been far from strong. But see, there's a mark on his temple as though he'd been struck by something. Something blunt but hard, it must have been, but I haven't seen any weapon."

"Could this have done it, sir?" One of the guards came forward carrying something in his hand. It was a piece of marble, a little larger than my fist, jagged on two sides and smooth on two sides. It looked as if it might have been part of an arm from some frieze. The doctor looked at it thoughtfully.

"Yes, that might have done it, if it was thrown with a good deal of strength. Where'd you find it?"

"Right here on the floor, sir. I don't think it was thrown, sir. It must have just fallen on the young fellow's head. See up there—you can see where it came from."

True enough, right over Kenmore's body was a section of the Parthenon frieze, and beside one of the mutilated figures was a fresh mark in the time-dimmed marble as though a piece had just been wrenched away. I looked up from Kenmore's white face to the line of still figures marching eternally around the room. I thought of the three old women, and the curse, and I wondered. But of course it was merely a coincidence.

6. *As I Remember*

As I remember, there were clanging gongs
  That beat the air to frenzy; there were bells
  Whose brazen clashing came like angry yells
Of metal monsters shouting strident songs.
As I remember, there were flaming tongs
  That picked my flesh, and I was bound by spells
  Of lunar sorcerers; a thousand hells
Were better than their hideous, careful wrongs.

As I remember, in my agony
  I begged the gods to save me from my pain;
I heard a sound as of a thing in glee,
  And beating to the chambers of my brain,
My answer came, ere I had turned to clay:
For silence into silence died away.

CRASHING SUNS

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

"They whirled and struck and fell there in the great gulf between the coldly smiling stars."

The Story Thus Far

THE story is laid 100,000 years in the future, when the human race has spread out and occupied all the planets in the solar system. Then the civilization of man is threatened with destruction in a titanic holocaust of crashing suns, as the great red star Alto, which for centuries has been moving swiftly in the direction of our solar system, is deflected from its course and hurtles directly toward our sun. Jan Tor is sent out in command of an interstellar space-ship to ascertain the cause of this deflection, in a faint hope of averting the impending cataclysm. He finds that the inhabitants of one of the worlds of Alto, to save their own race from destruction from the cooling of their dying sun, have increased the rotation of Alto by a powerful etheric ray, thereby deflecting it from its course so that it will squarely strike the solar system and be reborn from the crash of the two suns. The space-ship, escaping from the globe-men who have deflected Alto, and leaving most of the crew dead from the combat, speeds earthward through the void to try to bring help from the solar system.

5

ALWAYS, now, I remember the weeks of our homeward flight as a seemingly endless time during which we flashed on and on through space, struggling against our own desire to sleep. For now there were but four of us to operate the cruiser, and the generators alone required the constant care of two of our number, while another must stand watch in the conning-tower. That meant that each of us could grasp but a few hours of sleep at irregular intervals, while our ship fled on. Even so I do not think that we could have managed with any other engineer than Nar Lon, for he, who had been chief of the engineers, was equal to three men in his knowledge and vigilance.

So we sped on, while Alto dwindled in size behind us, and the bright star that was our own sun burned out in waxing glory ahead. And through the long hours of my watches in the conning-tower I watched red star and yellow with an unceasing, grow-

ing fearfulness, for well I knew that with each second they were leaping closer and closer toward each other, and toward the doom of the Eight Worlds.

On and on our cruiser hummed, at its highest speed, fleeing through the void toward our own sun with the velocity of light. And surely never was voyage so strange as ours, since time began. A voyage from star to star, in a ship flung forward by unseen vibrations, its crew four haggard and burning-eyed men who were racing against time to carry the news on which depended the fate of our universe. Dreamlike had been our outward voyage, but this homeward flight resembled an endless torturing nightmare.

At last, though, its end drew in sight, and gradually we slackened speed as we flashed nearer toward our own universe. By the time we received our first telestereo challenge from an Interplanetary Patrol cruiser outside Neptune we were moving at a scant million miles an hour. When we announced our identity, though, a peremptory order was flashed across the solar system for all interplanetary traffic to clear the space-lanes between ourselves and Earth, so that we were able to hurtle on toward the green planet at full speed without danger of collisions. And so, at last, our ship was slanting down again over the great Hall of Planets, into the very landing-court from which we had made the start of our momentous voyage.

Fighting against the fatigue which threatened to overwhelm me, I staggered out of the cruiser into the waiting hands of those in the landing-court, and five minutes later I was stumbling onto the dais where Mur Dak faced the hastily assembled Council. Standing there, swaying a little from sheer exhaustion, I spoke to Mur Dak and to the Council, relating in concise phrases the events of our voyage and the discovery we had made. When I had finished, saluting and slumping into a chair, there was an utter, deathlike silence over the great hall, and then a sigh went up as Mur Dak stepped forward to speak.

"You have heard the report of Jan Tor," he said, his voice calm and even as ever, "and you know now what doom threatens us and what chance we have to avert that doom. And now you must make decision. As you know, during the past weeks our scientists have been engaged in the construction of many hundreds of new vibration-cruisers like the one used by Jan Tor in his voyage. Soon, now, these cruisers will be completed, and they can be used by us in either of two ways.

"We can use them to save a fragment of our people, since in these ships a few thousand of us can escape to another star, though all the rest of us must inevitably perish with our universe when the two suns meet. Or we can use them for battle, instead of flight, speeding out in them to this planet of Alto's, attacking these globe-people and using their own force-ray projector in an attempt to swerve Alto aside before it destroys us. And that is the decision which you must make, a decision on which rests the fate of the races of man. Shall a few of us flee in these star-cruisers to another universe, allowing the oncoming sun to destroy our own, or shall we go out in them to Alto and make a single desperate attempt to swerve the approaching sun aside, and save the Eight Worlds?"

And now again there was silence, a thick and heavy silence, fateful with the doom of universes, the destiny of suns. I felt sleep overwhelming me, now, and though I struggled to keep my tired eyelids open I was slipping farther and farther down into drowsy depths of oblivion. Dimly, as though from an infinite distance, I heard a mighty shouting ris-

ing from the massed members around me. Then, just before complete unconsciousness descended on me, the roaring lessened for a single moment, and in that moment I heard the voice of Mur Dak, strong and vibrant.

"You have made decision," he was saying, "and when the cruiser-fleet is completed it shall start at once—*for Alto!*"

THE three weeks that elapsed between our return and the sailing of the great fleet were undoubtedly the most frenzied in the history of the Eight Worlds. Our own scientists had calculated that if we were to save our universe, Alto must be swerved from its course within the next fifty days, since after that it would be too late, for even if swerved aside after that time the dying sun would still crash through at least part of our solar system, wrecking it completely. We must reach the ray-projector on Alto's planet and use it before the end of the fiftieth day, or it would be too late.

So through the first twenty of those fifty days all other work throughout the Eight Worlds had been abandoned and every effort was concentrated upon the completion of the cruisers. Each planet was furnishing its own contingent for the fleet, and on each of the Eight Worlds men toiled to exhaustion in laboratory and factory, while others stood ready to take their places. Swiftly the cruisers, more than a thousand in number, approached completion, and now were being equipped with the weapon our scientists had devised for them, a deadly blue ray which had the power of stimulating atomic movement in every molecule of matter it touched to such a point that whatever matter was struck by it vanished beneath its touch, splitting instantly into its original atoms.

And through the nights, now, the men of every planet could see over their heads, like a great menace in the heavens, the fiery orb of Alto, growing, growing, dripping a crimson radiance upon the Eight Worlds, hanging in the heavens like a great seal of blood. And beneath that sign of death the work went madly on. And on all our planets laughter in sunlight and joy and freedom seemed things gone forever. For over the Eight Worlds lay the gigantic, shadowing wings of fear. . . .

One event stands out in my memory against that time of terror, one which occurred on the third day after our return. Mur Dak had summoned us again in the Hall of Planets, this time to his own office, and there, in the name of the Council, he formally tendered me the post of commander-in-chief of the great fleet which was even then preparing. No greater honor could have been accorded anyone in the Eight Worlds, and I could only stammer a few words of thanks. And then the chairman turned to Sarto Sen with the information that he had been named second in command. To our surprize, though, my friend made no answer, turning away from us for a moment and staring out of a window. When he turned back to us it was to say quietly, "I can't accept the post."

We regarded him in astonishment, and Mur Dak asked, "Your reason?"

"I can't say—now," replied my friend, and the astonishment in our expressions deepened.

Then Mur Dak's face became suddenly bleak, and his eyes scornful. "Is it possible that you are afraid?" he asked.

A deep flush rose over Sarto Sen's face but he did not answer, meeting our gaze for a moment and then turning toward the door. The spell of surprize that had held me broke then and I ran toward him, held his arm.

"Sarto Sen!" I cried, and could voice no other word.

He half turned toward me, his face softening a little, and then abruptly

wheeled and passed out of the door, leaving me standing there motionless.

The others were regarding me with a certain compassion, but seeing the misery on my face they made no comments on what had just occurred, and without further remark Hal Kur was named as my lieutenant. Later that day I learned that Sarto Sen, with Nar Lon and a few others of his assistants, had left in our original cruiser for his Venus laboratories.

If time had been mine I would have sought him out there, but now the cruisers of our fleet were almost complete, and all my time was taken up by the business of training the pilots who were to operate them. Luckily their controls were simple, differing but little in practise from those of our ordinary interplanetary space-ships, so that short as was the time at our disposal it proved enough for the training of the selected men. And so at last there came the twentieth day after our return, and on that night the great fleet made the start of its momentous voyage.

We had planned for the cruisers from each planet to proceed in separate groups out past Neptune, where all would rendezvous and take up their flight for Alto. And so that night the Earth contingent of ships made its start, from a great plain beyond the Hall of Planets. Crowds from over all Earth had assembled there to watch our departure—vast, silent crowds who watched our ships with the knowledge written plain on their faces that we held in our hands their only hope of life. And high above them gleamed the little spot of blood-red light that was Alto, the sun that was our goal.

Standing with Hal Kur and my pilot in the conning-tower of my flagship, I watched the ground sinking away beneath us as we rose smoothly up from Earth, with ever-increasing speed. As the gray old planet drew away beneath us my heart twisted with the thought that Sarto Sen was left behind, this time. And then our accompanying ships had slanted up beneath us and we were arrowing out through the solar system to the rendezvous beyond Neptune. When we had reached the appointed spot we paused, our cruisers hovering just beyond the icy world. A few minutes we waited and then a cloud of dark spots appeared behind us, sweeping smoothly up and resolving into a formation of cruisers which fell into place behind us. It was the fleet from Mars, and it was followed in quick succession by the contingents from Uranus and Venus. Out from arctic Neptune, behind us, there came now that world's ships, taking their place with us just ahead of the group from ringed Saturn. Then, last and at the same time, came the final two contingents, one a small one of few cruisers from Mercury, the other the mighty fleet from Jupiter. More than a thousand cruisers in all we hovered there, the massed forces of the Eight Worlds.

I gave a telestereo order which flashed through all the fleet, and the huge armada at once arranged itself in the form of a great triangle, a thousand miles wide at its base, with my own cruiser at the triangle's apex. Another order, and the whole vast fleet moved smoothly forward at uniform speed, a speed that mounted quickly as we flashed on through the ether toward the red star ahead with more and more power. The forces of man had gathered themselves and were moving out toward their supreme struggle, sailing out into the interstellar void to grapple with their doom, risking on one great throw of dice the life or death of their universe.

STANDING beside our pilot in my flagship's conning-tower, Hal Kur and I peered through the broad forewindow, watching Alto broaden again across the heavens as we raced on toward it. Already it burned in the sky ahead like a great fire, since

for four long weeks our fleet had hummed on toward it at highest speed. And now, on the thirtieth day of our flight, its end was at last in sight and we were preparing for our descent on the city of the globe-men.

The plan which we had formed was simple enough. We were to swoop suddenly upon the city, and while it was being attacked by the greater part of our fleet a picked few ships would land upon the great tower-platform, taking possession of the projector there. This our own scientists would train upon Alto in an effort to swerve the sun again from its course. It must be done soon, I knew, for this was the fiftieth day, which was our time-limit; and unless we made our stroke at the great sun before the tenth hour, it had been calculated, Alto would still come close enough to the solar system to cause collisions between its own far-swinging planets and our own sun and worlds, wrecking our solar system. Less than twelve hours remained to us.

Now, as we swept on toward the lurid, immense sun ahead, it was concerning my own courage that I felt most in doubt. The strange defection of Sarto Sen had already unsettled my mind, and as I glanced back through the rear window and glimpsed the far points of light which were all that was to be seen of the great fleet following, I felt with deepening anxiety the immensity of my responsibilities as commander.

How long I brooded there at the window I can not guess, but I was finally aroused by a sudden sharp exclamation from Hal Kur. The big engineer was gazing out through the front telescopic window toward the fiery disk of the sun ahead, amazement on his face. In a moment he beckoned me to his side, and I gazed out with him through the telescopic glass.

Even through the light-repelling shields which had been swung over all our windows the glare of the mighty sun ahead was almost blinding, but my eyes quickly became accustomed to it, and then I gave a catch of indrawn breath. For I had glimpsed against the crimson disk of Alto a little cloud of dark specks, a tiny swarm that seemed to be growing steadily larger. Breathlessly we watched them, and now we could not doubt that they were drawing nearer, increasing swiftly in size as we raced to meet them. And now they were taking definite shape, seen through our magnifying window, taking shape as smooth, long, fishlike hulls——

Hal Kur whirled around to me, a flame leaping into his eyes. "They're ships!" he cried. "Star-cruisers like our own! Those globe-men—they had our own cruiser!"

Something seemed to check the beating of my own heart at that cry. The cruisers ahead could only come from Alto, could only be manned by the globe-men of Alto's planets. While we lay imprisoned they had studied the design of our own cruiser, had understood and copied it, and during our homeward flight they had built their own great fleet of star-cruisers, guessing that our escape meant an attack on themselves later on. And now they had come out to meet that attack, there in the interstellar void, and the two great fleets were rushing headlong toward a battle that would be fought between the stars!

A moment I stood there, stunned, then turned to the telestereo which transmitted my orders to the fleet. "All ships prepare for battle," I announced, as calmly as possible. "Reduce speed gradually to one hundred miles an hour, holding the same formation until further order."

From our own cruiser, below me, there came now a running of feet and a shouting of hoarse voices, while there was a jarring and clanging of metal as the ray-tubes in the cruiser's sides were quickly made ready for

action. Our speed was swiftly decreasing, now, and as I glanced ahead I saw that the globe-men's ships were apparently slackening speed also, advancing toward us more slowly and moving now in two short columns. They knew, as well as we, that if both fleets used their maximum speed they would be unable to make contact with each other, and they sought a decision no less than we.

SLOWLY, now, ever more slowly, the two fleets were moving toward each other. I could now plainly observe the approaching enemy cruisers, very similar in design to our own but with shorter, thicker hulls, their globe-men pilots plainly visible in their bright-lit conning-towers. Headlong they came toward us, and headlong we advanced to meet them. Then, when the two fleets were almost at the point of colliding, there leaped out toward us from the oncoming cruisers a multitude of balls of destroying pink fire.

I had been expecting this, and at the moment they fired I spoke a single word into the telestereo. Instantly our own cruiser and the whole vast fleet behind it slanted sharply upward, while the globe-men craft and their balls of fire passed harmlessly beneath us. And as we swept over them there burned down from our own cruisers the blue de-atomizing ray, striking more than a score of ships in the fleet below and annihilating them instantly. In a moment we had passed them and at once we circled, massed, and then sped back to strike another blow at the enemy fleet, which had also circled and was coming to meet us.

Again the two fleets were racing toward each other, and as they neared each other, rosy fire and blue ray crossed and clashed from fleet to fleet. I saw the flame-balls strike cruisers around and behind us, cruisers that vanished in whirling storms of fire, though fire it could not have been that raged so fiercely there in the airless void. In the other fleet, ship after ship was flashing into blinding blue light and disappearing, as our rays struck them. Then the two fleets had met, had mixed and mingled, so that the battle changed suddenly to myriad individual combats between cruisers, whirling and striking and falling there in the great gulf between the coldly smiling stars, flaring into pink flame or blue light and vanishing from sight.

Toward us flashed an enemy cruiser, but as its rosy flame leapt toward us we veered sharply to one side, while at the same moment there came from the hull beneath me the hiss of released rays. They struck the tail of the other, which had swerved a moment too late, and the next moment it flared a blue-lit wreck, then vanished. But now two enemy cruisers were swooping down on us from above, ramming headlong toward us. There was no time for us to twist aside from that fierce plunge, but before they could loose their flame upon us the blue ray of a ship beyond us stabbed across and struck one of the two, and in the moment that it hovered there, luminous with its own destruction, the other smashed squarely into it and then both had flared and vanished.

As they did so a racing cruiser struck us a glancing blow from beneath and our ship reeled and spun, throwing those of us in the conning-tower violently to one side. When Hal Kur and I scrambled to our feet the pilot lay motionless on the floor, stunned, and at once I leapt to the controls. That moment in which our ship had been pilotless had driven us up above the battle, which lay stretched below us as a mighty field of circling, striking ships, burned across by pink flame and livid blue light. And now I was slanting our own ship down again, swooping headlong down through space while the hissing rays from our own hull seared

down toward the enemy ships below. A wild exultation thrilled through me, now, that sheer joy of battle which will ever last in the heart of man, no matter what centuries of peace are his, and I laughed crazily as we rose and circled and swooped again upon the whirling ships below. Of all the battles in the long history of man's battles, surely this was the most glorious of all. What ancient struggles on earth, or on the seas, or between the planets themselves, could equal this mighty grappling of two fleets in the void between the stars, with a mighty sun at their backs and the fate of a universe at stake?

But now, as our cruiser soared again above the fighting ships, I saw that the craft of the globe-men were perishing in increasing numbers, assailed by the blue rays from our own. They seemed to halt, waver for a moment, and then each of the globe-men's cruisers had ceased fighting and had suddenly dropped down a full hundred miles, massing together there and racing away toward Alto. They were in flight!

I had no need to command a pursuit, for at sight of the fleeing craft our own ships turned and leapt eagerly after them, my own cruiser in the van. Swiftly our speed mounted, until the two fleets were flashing toward Alto at full speed, the enemy ships managing to keep just out of striking distance ahead of us, while we strained our generators to the utmost to close the gap between us. On and on they fled, at the speed of light, with our own fleet close at their heels, on toward the crimson sun ahead, which filled half the sky as we raced toward it. Suddenly a black blot appeared against that sun, largening with terrific speed, and in a moment the fleeing cruisers ahead had disappeared inside it, vanished inside the great ether-cavity which loomed now before ourselves. But our own ships never faltered, speeding straight on, and in a second we, too, were plunging into darkness unutterable as we raced straight into the vast ether-cavity after the fleeing ships. The droning of our generators ceased and we drifted for a torturing moment through the blackness, then burst out again into the red glare of the great sun ahead. And ahead still fled the globe-men's cruisers, heading directly toward their own sun.

Straight after them we raced, speeding over the great sun in turn. Then, just when the greater part of our fleet was flashing directly above the sun, the humming of our generators faltered and died. And instantly our ship was falling, plunging headlong down into the fiery ocean of Alto, ten million miles beneath!

The ships of our fleet were falling with us, like wind-tossed leaves, and now I cried out and pointed upward, even as we whirled down to the fiery death below. Far, far above there hung a little group of cruisers from which broad rays of purple light were stabbing down toward us, bathing our ships in a weird glow. "They've trapped us!" I cried despairingly. "Those ships—that purple ray—it's neutralizing the vibrations of our generators—they led us over this sun and we're falling——"

Below yawned the fiery ocean of red flame that was Alto, stretching from horizon to horizon, its tongues and prominences licking hungrily up toward us. Even through the super-insulation of the cruiser's walls we felt the growing, stifling heat of the sun below. And then I cried out and pointed upward once more. A score of cruisers at the tail of our fleet had escaped the fate of the rest of us by swerving aside in time, and instantly they had turned and slanted upward, then circled once and plunged down toward the hovering ray-ships. They never even used the blue ray but made sure of their enemies by their own deaths, plunging into the enemy cruisers in a score of swift, shattering

collisions, and then the purple rays around us had vanished, while the shattered wrecks above whirled down into the crimson sun beneath us. With the vanishing of the rays our generators took up again their familiar humming drone, and the ships of our fleet slanted sharply up, to escape the fiery doom below.

The remaining ships of the globe-men's fleet had disappeared, now, and glancing at our time-dials I gave an order through the telesterco. Our fleet, still over five hundred cruisers strong, sped away from the great sun toward the buff-colored little ball that was its inmost planet. Swiftly its color deepened again to crimson as we arrowed down toward it, and I glanced anxiously again at the time-dials, for less than a quarter-hour remained now in which to get the ray-tube in action on the whirling sun behind us. Meteorlike our ships split the air of the red planet as we shot across its surface, and in a moment we were slanting down toward the city of the globe-men, toward the massed black roofs and streets above which loomed the mighty tower.

As we dropped down toward it there rose to meet us fully fifty star-cruisers like our own, the last remnants of the globe-men's fleet which we had pursued in past their sun. With suicidal determination they flashed straight up toward us, and the next minute was one of swift, terrific battle, the air around us a hell of blue light and pink flame, leaping and burning from ship to ship, while scores of wrecks whirled down into the black city below. Five minutes after that fierce attack we had lost a full hundred of our ships, but we had accounted for the last cruiser of the globe-men, or so we thought.

And now my own flagship and the designated few agreed on were dipping swiftly toward the great tower-platform, where stood the ray-projector which we had fought our way from universe to universe to reach. We were dropping lower, gradually decreasing our speed as we neared the platform, lower, lower. . . .

A CRY of fierce rage rang through the hull beneath me, and at the same moment I was aware of a long, dark shape that suddenly flashed down past us from above, a last cruiser of the globe-men which must have hovered high above us until that moment. It dropped below us with lightning speed, then hovered ominously beside the tower-platform for a single moment. In that moment a hundred shafts of blue light from our own ships leapt down toward it, but even as they did so there spurted from its side globe after globe of the annihilating pink flame, striking the broad platform and the four mighty supporting columns of the tower in a score of places. The enemy cruiser itself flashed into nothingness beneath the rays of our ships, but a great cry went up from us as we saw that its work was done, for the fire-balls that struck the tower blazed fiercely up for a moment and then vanished; and then the mighty tower was swaying, falling, crumbling, crashing down to the ground in a mighty avalanche of broken wreckage, raining its mighty fragments upon the city far beneath. The tower was gone! The ray-projector was annihilated!

And now our ships hung motionless, stunned, even as I was stunned, gazing through the window stupidly at the wreckage far below. We had lost! For when I finally raised my eyes I saw that the pointer on the time-dial before me had passed the tenth hour. Even had we had another ray-projector of our own, it would have been too late. Nothing now could save the Eight Worlds, nothing could swerve the mighty sun aside in time to save our universe. We races of men had risked our lives, our universe, in one great cast of the dice, and—we had lost.

Suddenly Hal Kur seemed to go insane, there beside me in the conning-tower. He choked, uttered incoherent exclamations, pointed a trembling hand up through our telescopic window toward the thundering red sun above. I did not raise my eyes, and he clutched my arm, pulling me to the window, his upward-pointing hand trembling violently, his eyes staring.

I looked up. There, beside the very rim of the mighty sun, was a tiny black spot, a long, dark speck that hung steady, playing a beam of brilliant light upon Alto. For a moment I did not understand, but gazed dazedly, trying to comprehend what I saw. That little black spot, that long, black shape——

"Look!" Hal Kur was screaming, like one gone mad. *"It's"*—he choked, staggered—*"It's our old cruiser! It's Sarto Sen!"*

Sarto Sen! The name seared across my brain like living fire. That ray—he was playing it upon the edge of Alto even as the globemen had done—was spinning the great sun faster, faster——

"But it's too late!" I cried, throwing an anguished hand out toward the time-dial.

Too late! Nothing could swerve the sun aside in time to save the Eight Worlds, now. Too——

I stopped, a thick silence settling over us. And in that silence Hal Kur and I gazed up together, awe falling upon our faces, such awe as had never been felt by man before.

For there, across the face of the mighty crimson sun, had appeared a thin black line, a line that thickened, widened, with every second. And now it was a gap, a narrow gap between the two cleft halves of the great red star, a gap that swiftly was widening. Alto was *splitting!* Splitting into two great halves, into two masses of crimson flame which swept ever wider from each other. Splitting like a great flywheel, when the ray of Sarto Sen increased its spinning to such a rate that it could no longer hold together. Beside it, its brilliant ray playing upon the dividing sun until the last moment, hung the little cruiser, and then it had vanished from sight as the right half of the sun, an ocean of raging fires, swept over it.

But Sarto Sen had won! Farther and farther apart swept the two halves of the divided sun, diverging each to follow its separate course, moving away on either side, slowly, majestically. Between them, now, there shone forth the yellow star that was our own sun, the doom that had threatened it vanishing now as the two halves of Alto moved away from each other, each receding farther and farther from each other and from our own sun. And below us, now, the red planet that had been Alto's was moving away also, hurtling toward the right half of the cleft sun and disappearing inside it with a great burst of flame. Planet after planet was vanishing in right sun or left, until at last our cruisers hovered alone in the void between the two receding suns.

In our own cruisers, now, and in all the ships around me, I knew, was rising a babel of hoarse shouts of joy, of insane, frenzied gladness, and Hal Kur beside me was shouting like a madman. The races of man had won, had conquered the greatest menace that had ever threatened them, had split a sun and wrecked a universe to save their own.

But for myself, in that moment, I knew only that my friend was dead.

IT WAS night when the last of our fleet came to Earth once more. We had sped in from the long days of our homeward flight, pausing at each planet to allow the cruisers from that planet to leave us. And few enough were the ships that returned to each world, of the hundreds that had gone out, yet they

were welcomed by such mighty, shouting crowds as no man had seen before. For the Eight Worlds had gone mad with joy.

So, at last, the dozen battered cruisers which were all that survived of Earth's contingent were dropping down again toward the Hall of Planets. Brilliant lights flared around it, and beneath them, it seemed, was collected half the population of Earth, a mighty, shouting throng. Slowly our ships slanted down over them, sinking down into the inner landing-court of the great building, and there it was that we were met by Mur Dak and the members of the Council.

The chairman was the first to wring my hand, and it was from him that I learned first how Sarto Sen had planned to save us, duplicating in his own laboratories the force-ray of the globe-men and speeding out with it in our old cruiser to Alto, accompanied only by Nar Lon and his devoted assistants. He carried out his plan under the imputation of cowardice, as Mur Dak told me with working face, because he knew that that plan meant death for himself and knew that I would have insisted on sharing that death.

But now the shouting of the great throng outside the Hall of Planets was becoming insistent, and they were calling for Jan Tor. Already the Council members were passing out of the landing-court with the crews of the surviving cruisers, passing through the building to the crowd outside, which greeted them with a mighty roar of applause. Mur Dak alone remained, with Hal Kur and me, and in a moment he left us also, with our promise to follow in a few minutes. I could not, just then, face those rejoicing, welcoming masses. Beside me, I knew, there would have stood, invisible to them, the shade of another, the shadow of a thin, spectacled youth to whom all this was due. So I stood in the quiet landing-court, gazing up into the jeweled skies once more—gazing up toward two tiny spots of red light, far-separated already, which gleamed above us.

A mist seemed to come across my eyes, blurring and obscuring the two far points of light at which I gazed. From beside me, then, came the deep voice of Hal Kur.

"I know, Jan Tor," he was saying. "He was my friend, too." He gestured toward the battered cruisers beside us, then up into the light-jeweled heavens.

"It was from this Earth that the first man went out, Jan Tor. Out to planet after planet, until a universe was theirs. And now that Sarto Sen has saved that universe, and has given us these cruisers, how far will man go, I wonder? Out—out—universe after universe, star after star, constellations, nebulæ—out—out—out. . . . "

He paused, a dark, erect figure beside me there, his arm flung up in superb, defiant promise toward the brilliant, thronging stars.

[THE END]

The WHITE VAMPIRE

BY·ARLTON·EADIE

"He realized the full hideousness of the fate in store for him."

THE little stern-wheel launch gingerly nosed its way through the last maze of shifting sand-bars and headed for the cluster of mud huts that shimmered vaguely through the heat-haze of the tropical noon. From beside her stumpy funnel a plume of steam shot upward as her siren wailed over the flooded waters of the River Rinué, startling the chime-birds into frantic wheelings above the feathery tree-tops, and rudely disturbing the siesta of the dark-skinned warriors of Imanzi, causing them to draw the folds of their sleeping-robes closer about their heads as they muttered a drowsy charm against the shrieking water-devil of the white man.

Lieutenant McFee, the young officer in charge of the Hausa patrol of the district, became dimly aware of the sound amid the chaotic visions incidental to the tail-end of a spell of fever. But he recognized the import of the signal, and immediately arose, swallowed the regulation quinine tabloid, swung on his sun-helmet, and sallied forth.

The skipper of the launch hailed him as he crossed the gang-plank.

"Sorry we're overdue, sir, but I got under way the first moment this old water-pusher could make head against the current—and we didn't spare the logs coming up, either. If you'll mobilize your gay soldier-lads to hump the stores ashore, I'll be casting off right away. I want to get down to Yola before those flaming shallows shift again. By the way," he added as he descended to

the deck, "I've brought something that wasn't in your indent. It's a young swell with pots of money and no end of a pull with the Administration. He's come upstream to shoot lions and have a good time generally."

The somewhat caustic comment that rose to Lieutenant McFee's lips was checked by the approach of the newcomer. For a few seconds the two men eyed each other in speculative silence.

Lieutenant McFee saw a good-looking young man of about his own age, clad in an immaculate and expensive tropical outfit. His smart drill suit still retained its pristine snowy splendor; his cartridge-belt, riding-boots and revolver-holster were of glossy and squeaky newness. Around him lay spread a perfect armory of sporting-guns, backed by sufficient foil-lined ammunition cases to supply a punitive expedition. The Honorable Clifford Egerton, on his part, beheld a gaunt figure in sun-bleached khaki, with a tanned and thickly freckled countenance and close-cropped sandy hair. At first sight he might have been mistaken for a long-legged, overgrown schoolboy; but the grim set of the lean, clean-shaven jaws and the expression in the steady gray eyes quickly dispelled that illusion. A stickler for military smartness might have found several defects in his general turn-out. The only thing about him that was brightly polished was his revolver-butt—and that by frequent use.

"Ah, pleased to meet you, Lieutenant," said the Honorable Clifford Egerton as he came forward and shook hands. "Is there any shooting to be had around here?"

For an instant the corners of McFee's mouth twitched strangely. Then he nodded his head.

"Any amount of it," he answered gravely. And it was only subsequently that the questioner realized the exquisite humor that lay behind the seemingly simple reply.

IN DUE course the launch disgorged her freight and headed downstream. The two men watched its receding smoke-plume above the trees until it merged into the misty blue of the distance. Then they turned and re-entered the native hut which formed the patrol officer's quarters.

"Do you know, I heard quite a lot about you at Lokoja," Egerton remarked as he threw himself into one of the long cane chairs and lit a cigarette. "They call you 'Fighting McFee' down there, and swear that the river tribes look on you as a real number-one-size tin god."

McFee shook his head in embarrassed dissent.

"Very often my sphere of influence extends no farther than a bullet can reach. I only wish that your very flattering description of my reputation were true," he added regretfully. "In that case I might succeed in ridding my district of one of the most infamous villains that has ever infested it."

"Indeed?" queried Egerton with quickened interest. "Who is he, and what particular form does his infamy take?"

"He is an Arab called Ishak-El-Naga, and he's a dealer in slaves."

Egerton twisted in his chair and stared at the speaker in surprize.

"Slaves?" he echoed. "Oh, come! I say, you don't mean to tell me there are slaves at the present day—in a British colony!"

"Protectorate," corrected McFee. "Of course, Ishak-El-Naga does not work openly. He collects his stock-in-trade from the tiny bush villages, either kidnaping the poor wretches, or trading them from their chiefs for gin or gunpowder, or—what is worse—inciting one tribe to attack another in the hopes of bagging the survivors of the losing side. When he's

got his caravan together he drives 'em like cattle and sells 'em to the desert tribes north of Lake Chad. It's a good thousand miles, and part of the way lies through a waterless desert. I came across his trail once or twice soon after I was first detailed here, and I can assure you it was not a pretty sight. In those days he used to leave the poor devils where they dropped; now he goes to the trouble of burying them in order to make his line of march less conspicuous."

"But a man seldom falls stone-dead from exhaustion," objected the frankly skeptical Egerton. "Some of them might linger for days."

McFee gave a grim, mirthless laugh. "Rest assured, they have to get their dying over quickly when Ishak-El-Naga is around!"

Clifford Egerton started to his feet, his usually ruddy face drawn and haggard.

"You mean that he butchers the stragglers?" he cried in horror.

"What else?" answered McFee. "Do you expect an Arab slaver to run a Red Cross convoy?"

"And, knowing this, you still allow the villain to be at large?"

The patrol officer raised his sandy eyebrows and shrugged.

"Knowing is very different from proving. He's as cunning as Satan, and he has spies everywhere. If I could but get evidence against him his career would be a short one. But evidence is just the one thing that I'm not likely to get."

"Why not?"

"Because he has found a way of preventing the natives giving information against him. They are forbidden to speak by a mysterious veiled woman who appears to them at intervals. She is credited with possessing supernatural powers and they call her *Sitoka Kilui.*"

"What does that signify in English?"

"Freely translated, it means 'The White Vampire.'"

A SUDDEN exclamation caused McFee to glance up. Egerton had turned and was staring with wide-open eyes at a figure which had emerged from the jungle trail into the glare of sunlight which flooded the compound.

"Gad!" he muttered half to himself. "A girl, by all that's wonderful—and a dashed good-looking one, too!"

The spontaneous tribute was not undeserved. Tall above the average, she moved with that easy grace which no amount of training can impart, but which seems to be the natural attribute of the women of the South. Her flawless features were shaded by a white sombrero, beneath whose broad brim there clustered a mass of curls of the color of freshly minted gold. Her beauty was enhanced by a skin of exquisite, creamy fairness; her eyes were dark and still as mountain pools. Eyes of night, hair like sunbeams—her whole appearance, like the fact of her presence in that wild spot, seemed a bewildering, bewitching paradox. Small wonder that Egerton stood agape and wondering at the unexpected vision.

"Who is she?" he whispered. "And what on earth is she doing here?"

"She is Señorita Juanita Rasparteo, the daughter of the Portuguese trader here," McFee informed him.

"A Portuguese? Impossible!"

McFee laughed. "Fact, I assure you. You mustn't judge the whole race by the snuff-and-butter specimens you meet at Lagos."

Meanwhile the girl was approaching with hasty steps, glancing frequently over her shoulder as though she feared pursuit—a fear which appeared to be shared by the slim native girl who followed at her heels.

The reason of their haste was soon apparent. Barely had they reached the center of the compound when the bushes behind parted and debouched a score of half-naked Bhutumas armed with bows and spears. At their head was a tall man wearing the flowing draperies and green *haick*, bound round his head by cords of twisted camel's hair, which denoted the high-caste Arab, a Hadj who had performed the Mecca pilgrimage. At sight of him McFee's hand instinctively sought the weapon at his side.

"It is Ishak-El-Naga," he whispered rapidly, "and it looks as though he's out for trouble."

Followed by Egerton, he ran out of the hut and placed himself between the girls and their pursuers.

"Greeting, O Hadj Ishak-El-Naga," he said, addressing the leader in Arabic. "Do you come in peace?"

The man stared at him insolently for a moment, then slowly shrugged beneath his gold-embroidered *burnous*.

"As Allah wills, who giveth both victory and defeat," he answered in a tone of studied indifference. "I am come to claim this maiden, Inyoni, who hath been affianced to me according to the custom of her people. A full score of oxen did I pay her father——"

"He lies, O white man, he lies!" cried the native girl, throwing her lithe body in the sand at McFee's feet. "No oxen were paid, neither was I affianced. His people seized me while I was gathering *kava* in the woods and took me to the secret place of slaves. But I escaped and made my way back to my mistress," she pointed to Juanita as she spoke. "Protect me, *Bwana* McFee! Do not let him take me away, for I am a free maiden and slave to none."

"And that's the honest truth, Mr. McFee," said Juanita, speaking for the first time. Her voice was full and musical, and bore an accent that showed that she must have spent some years at least in the United States. "Ishak offered his oxen to me if I'd give up the girl to him. But I wasn't trading any."

Lieutenant McFee turned to the scowling Arab.

"Bring hither the maiden's father that he may testify that thy words are true," he said sternly.

A line of gleaming teeth showed between the black beard as Ishak-El-Naga burst into a scornful laugh. "Am I Allah, that I can cause the dead to walk?" he jeered.

McFee started and his gray eyes hardened to two points of steel. "You mean that her father is dead?"

"It was written that this morn should be his last," Ishak answered sullenly. "The man was old. He died. It was the will of Allah."

"By heaven! I more than half suspect that the scoundrel has murdered him to make good his claim," McFee muttered to Egerton. Aloud he said: "I must look further into the matter, O Hadj. Meanwhile the maiden Inyoni remains with her former mistress."

"Then is it fated that you defy me?" The Arab's words were accompanied by an evil scowl.

"It is," answered McFee curtly. "Thou hast my permission to depart."

The Arab raised his clenched hands above his head.

"O beardless dogs!" he shouted furiously. "Fools of a nation of fools! May the fire on thy hearth be quenched and thy house be desolated. As for this maiden," he went on, fixing a baleful glance on the shrinking girl, "her fate shall be whispered of for generations to come. Beware, O thou accursed McFee, beware!"

Turning on his heel, he rapped out an order in the native dialect and, accompanied by his savage bodyguard, plunged into the winding trail and disappeared.

"And now," said McFee, gently raising the trembling Inyoni to her feet, "tell me how I may find the secret place where Ishak-El-Naga keeps his prisoners, so that they may be freed and he punished."

A look of distress came into Inyoni's dusky features.

"Gladly would I do so, *Bwana*," she said haltingly, "but I am afraid. Were I to name the place, the *Sitoka Kilui* would surely slay me."

"You see," McFee said in an undertone to Egerton, "the White Vampire again! By heaven! it almost maddens me to think that hundreds of lives should be sacrificed for the sake of one unspoken word. Inyoni," he went on, turning again to the girl, "you *shall* speak. You shall tell me of this secret place, so that I may gain evidence to crush this Ishak-El-Naga like the loathsome reptile he is. Speak, Inyoni—I command you!"

The trembling girl hesitated, her dark eyes fixed on the young officer's face. Something that she saw there must have given her courage, for she drew herself erect with an air of sudden determination.

"Yes, I will speak!" she cried. "If you will hunt the White Vampire——"

Above the drone of insect life and murmur of the distant river there sounded a shrill whistling note, and Inyoni sank into McFee's arms with the shaft of a Bhutuma arrow quivering in her rounded breast.

In an instant all was confusion. The hastily mustered Hausas sent volley after volley crashing through the tangled undergrowth whence the arrow had sped. But it was wasted ammunition, and none realized the fact better than McFee. Lucky indeed would be the bullet that found its billet amid that wilderness of canes and trailing vines. At length he ordered his men to cease fire and retraced his steps to where Inyoni lay. He tenderly lifted the limp form and bore it into the hut, and with difficulty managed to force a little brandy between her lips. After a while her eyes slowly opened.

"The vengeance of the White Vampire has fallen." The words came faintly between the last fluttering breaths. "Avenge me, *Bwana* . . . watch . . . beside the Pool of Ghosts . . . at moonrise . . . tonight! . . ."

Within the hour McFee and Egerton, armed to the teeth, set out to solve the mystery of the fearsome being whose presence lay like a blight over the countryside. But before they left, the spirit of Inyoni had already solved the last great mystery of all.

THE western horizon was ablaze with the vivid hues of the tropical sunset when the two white men reached the large, circular sheet of water known to the natives as the Pool of Ghosts.

They were alone. Lieutenant McFee—a keen student of savage psychology—had quickly sensed the superstitious dread with which the mere mention of their destination had been received by his men. Strong as a horse, brave as a lion, an adept at bush tactics, the Hausa as a fighting machine is perfection itself. But the moment his imagination begins to busy itself in occult speculations, then the thousand and one devils that comprise the savage Pantheon enter into his thick, woolly pate and he is apt to become no better than a frightened child. And on such an errand, McFee decided, a crowd of jumpy followers would be a source of weakness rather than of strength.

Twilight is always brief under the equator. In an instant the scarlet and gold of the heavens were obliterated as though a huge, invisible brush charged with indigo had been swept from zenith to horizon. Then the thronging stars of the tropics flashed forth like thick-sown gems, and it was night.

But Lieutenant McFee and his companion had no time to waste in admiring the beauties of nature. They took advantage of the last few seconds of daylight to make a survey of their surroundings, and on the ground about the margin, muddy from the recent floods, they discovered something to send a thrill through the stoutest heart.

"Lions' spoor!" said McFee, pointing to the deeply indented impressions. "Look—there are hundreds of trails—the place must be infested with the beasts! By Jove, Egerton, it looks as though you were going to have the chance of bagging your first lion straight away."

"Nothing would please me better," was the delighted reply. "That's really what I came up country for, but things have been happening so quickly since my arrival that I'd almost forgotten the fact."

Something like a sigh escaped McFee's lips. "I had hoped there would be sport afoot more exciting even than lion-hunting," he said regretfully. "However, let us make ourselves comfortable in one of these trees and we'll take things as they come. Remember, when you draw at a lion, aim just behind the shoulder. A bullet planted there is more likely to drop him than one in the head."

Egerton made a wry face in the darkness. "I'm not likely to hit a haystack just at present. It's so dark that I can't so much as see my foresight."

"Wait," answered McFee. "There will be light enough presently."

Even as he spoke the sky began to blanch, and presently the rim of the full African moon pushed its way above the surrounding tree-tops and filled the little clearing about the lake with its cold, bright radiance.

"Hist!" The warning whisper from McFee recalled the other's wandering attention. "Look—on your right!"

For a moment the less experienced Egerton could detect nothing unusual. Then, among the tall grass, he saw a ripple slowly passing as though a gust of wind had stirred it. But he knew that could not be the explanation, for the night was still and breathless. Again the grass-stems rippled; then slowly parted, and into the moonlight there stepped a beast that caused an involuntary gasp of wonder and admiration to escape the lips of the watchers.

It was an immense albino lion!

From the top of its mane-crowned head to the ground it was the height of an average man; from nose to tail-tip it could not have measured an inch under twelve feet. But, large as it bulked, its unusual color made it appear still larger. In every species of animal there occasionally occur specimens who, through some obscure defect of the pigment-cells, fail to assume their normal coloration, and it was to this rare and interesting type that the beast belonged. Its color throughout was a pure, silky white, except the eyes, which smoldered red as garnets in their deep-set sockets, and the half-opened, fang-fringed mouth. As it stalked proudly forth, the moonlight gleaming on its mane and hide, it presented a weird yet magnificent sight; so much so, indeed, that Egerton, keen hunter as he was, felt a pang of compunction to think that this marvel of strength and beauty would soon be rolling in its death agony.

But the feeling quickly passed and one of elation took its place. What a trophy to take home! His first lion—and such a lion! Mindful of his friend's advice, he pressed the butt of his repeating cordite rifle into his shoulder and took careful aim. The next moment the heavy bullet would have been sent crashing on its deadly errand, when he felt an iron grip upon his arm.

"Don't shoot!" McFee whispered the words with his mouth close to the

other's ear. "That is no wild lion. It wears a golden collar—I just caught the glint of it beneath the mane."

Too much astonished to answer, Egerton lowered his weapon and stared at the strange beast, which had now advanced to the edge of the pool and was lowering its head to drink. As it did so the moonlight fell full upon a massive golden collar encircling its neck.

Having drunk its fill, it raised its head and sent a low, reverberating roar into the night; then turned about and slowly passed out of sight among the long grass. Lieutenant McFee at once slung his rifle and prepared to descend to the ground.

"I intend to follow that lion," he said in answer to Egerton's whispered query. "Perhaps it may lead us to the very heart of the mystery we set out to solve."

At first sight the spot where the beast had disappeared seemed to be an impenetrable thicket of aloe bushes and thorny canes. Closer inspection, however, revealed a narrow path intersecting it, and into this, with wary eyes and ready rifles, the two men plunged. They had barely proceeded a dozen paces, however, before the even straightness of the path aroused a growing suspicion in McFee's mind. Stooping down, he drew his hunting-knife and thrust it through the ankle-deep grass. A few inches below the surface of the ground the blade grated against something hard. Twice he repeated the experiment at different spots; then he sheathed his knife and turned to Egerton.

"I thought so," he said in a low voice. "Beneath us is an ancient roadway faced with blocks of stone. The thin layer of soil which has been deposited on it in the course of ages is not deep enough to enable the larger bushes to take root; otherwise it would have been overgrown long since."

"What, a stone roadway in the heart of the African bush? Impossible!"

"It may not always have been bush; I have a very shrewd idea that at one time the river came up as far as this—you know how the bends are apt to silt up. Anyway, an ancient roadway naturally presupposes something equally ancient at the other end, so come on. Keep your gun handy, but don't fire unless you have to."

A few minutes later McFee's surmise received ample confirmation. The path turned sharply and then terminated in a wedge-shaped opening in the side of a low, conical hill. Although both jambs and lintel were thickly incrusted with moss, there was not the slightest doubt that they were of artificial construction.

"Why, it's a regular tunnel!" exclaimed Egerton. "And look at the carvings! I know I'm not much of an archeologist, but they look to me exactly like those I saw at Luxor. Surely the ancient Egyptians could not have penetrated so far up country?"

McFee did not answer. He was staring with a puzzled frown at the hill before him. He had previously noticed that its outline seemed suspiciously symmetrical, but it was not until his companion mentioned the word "Egyptian" that his mind grasped the startling truth. "Why, the thing is nothing more nor less than a pyramid overgrown with vegetation!" he cried. "It's the very thing I've been trying to find ever since I've been stationed here."

Egerton grasped his arm. "You mean it is the secret slave-hold of El-Naga?" he breathed.

Lieutenant McFee unslung his rifle and pushed forward the safety-catch.

"More than that—it's the home of the White Vampire!" he said grimly. "Forward!"

Followed by his friend, he stepped across the threshold and plunged into the yawning blackness beyond.

Twenty paces; then a faint flickering light became visible ahead. At the sight they pressed forward eagerly. Then without warning the solid ground seemed to slide from beneath their feet and they pitched headlong forward and downward.

McFee was conscious of a sickening blow on his head—a thousand lights danced before his eyes—then he remembered no more.

WHEN McFee next opened his eyes the sight they beheld was so extraordinary that for a moment he thought it the figment of a dream.

He was standing on a long, raised platform in the center of a lofty hall, which, from the solidity of its construction and the character of the decoration on its walls, was evidently situated in the heart of the pyramid. On each hand stretched a sea of upturned savage faces. Their dusky features were indistinct amid the gloom, but the myriads of watching eyes, catching the wan light which struggled from above, stood out in startling contrast. Six yards in front of him, its blood-red eyes watching his every movement, crouched the albino lion. Behind him was a pillar of granite, and to this McFee's arms and legs were fastened by means of four hinged bronze staples of curious, and seemingly antique, workmanship. In spite of the stifling heat of the crowded and ill-ventilated place, McFee felt a chilly shiver pass down his spine as he realized the full hideousness of the fate in store for him. A helpless prisoner, he was about to be subjected to the onslaught of the white lion!

For what seemed like hours he stood gazing into the smoldering eyes of the beast before him, dully wondering at its delay in giving play to the instincts of its natural blood-lust. Nor did his wonder lessen when at length he perceived the reason of its seeming inactivity. A steel chain stretched from the wall to its collar, preventing its further progress. For the present, at least, he was out of reach of its teeth and claws. The deep sigh of relief which he uttered was answered by a voice close at hand.

"Thank God, you're still alive, Mac!"

It was Egerton who spoke. Turning his head to the left, McFee saw that Egerton was secured to the pillar in the same manner as himself.

"Looks as if I've landed you in a most unholy mess, old chap," McFee said apologetically. "Apparently Ishak-El-Naga is about to provide an elaborately staged spectacle for the edification and amusement of his slaves, with us as the star turns! I wonder what is to be the first item on the program?"

"Probably the first item will also be the last," Egerton answered dryly. "Ishak came round while you were still out for the count, and made a long speech to the audience, and I think he was promising them something top-hole in the way of thrills. I couldn't understand what he was saying, of course, but his expression wasn't exactly benevolent. After he'd finished speaking his piece he flitted off, and in flitted the White Vampire."

"You've seen her?" cried McFee. "What is she like?"

"She's got eyes as black as"—he gave an unsteady laugh—"as that beautiful Portuguese girl's. As for the rest of her appearance—well, you'll soon have an opportunity of judging for yourself!"

A sudden blare of barbaric music echoed through the temple and from the door at the farther end there emerged a party of Bhutumas lustily blowing hollowed elephant tusks. These were followed by a double file of warriors bearing shields of white ox-hide and long, spade-headed spears. Then came four young native girls, their slender, oil-anointed bodies bending and swaying beneath the weight of a huge golden canopy, un-

der which there glided an imposing and sinister figure which came slowly forward and halted before the pinioned men.

Lieutenant McFee and the White Vampire were at last face to face.

DRAPED in robes of spotless white, with a veil of the same color completely enveloping the head, the thing bore a shuddering resemblance to a walking corpse. Only the eyes which glittered like polished jet through the slits of the head-dress told that the being within, be it man or woman, was at least alive. Although McFee had steeled himself to meet the unexpected, the effect of that veiled presence was both repulsive and terrifying. Immeasurably greater was its effect on the minds of the ignorant savages. A whimper of abject terror rose from a thousand throats as they prostrated themselves face downward on the ground.

"*Sitoka Kilui . . . Sitoka Kilui. . . .*"

During the hush which succeeded the utterance of the dread title, two of the guards came forward and cast something on the bronze braziers which glowed on either side of the recumbent lion, and immediately a haze of aromatic fumes floated up and began to eddy about the head of the animal. Whatever subtle drug may have been employed, its effect was almost magical. In an instant the beast's lethargy had vanished. The long, tufted tail began to lash from side to side; the nostrils to dilate and twitch; the eyes to glare furiously. Rising to its feet, with stretched forelegs and arched back, it stood for a second motionless; then, with a roar that seemed to shake the very earth, launched itself straight at McFee.

Brought up short by the restraining chain, it stood reared up on its hind legs, a vision of bristling mane and bared teeth, as it pawed the air in a vain endeavor to reach its victim. But the chain held fast, and the foiled brute retreated with a low growl, only to turn immediately and repeat its leap.

Time after time the beast threw itself against the straining chain, and to McFee's excited senses it appeared as if each successive leap brought it nearer and ever nearer to him. For a while he set this down to mere imagination on his part. Then he began to gage the forward leaps by comparing them to the cracks in the stone flooring. At once a dim suspicion of the truth entered his mind. He looked at the chain, and horror clutched his heart like an icy hand.

Instead of being fastened to the wall, it really passed through an opening, and was being gradually paid out from the other side!

"It's no use, Egerton, old man," he groaned. "We're booked this time. He intends to let that beast play with us just like a cat with a couple of crippled mice, before finishing us off. No wonder he succeeds in keeping his slaves in a state of terror. I suspected something pretty bad—but nothing so devilish as this!"

The chain tautened with a jingling crash as the lion leapt again. So close was it now that he could feel its hot, fetid breath on his forehead. The end was near.

A cold, implacable fury took possession of Lieutenant McFee. He had faced death too often in the routine of his duties at that lonely outpost to feel overmuch fear at the certainty of meeting it now. But to die without striking a blow, the sport of a rascally Arab slaver—oh, for a dozen files of his beloved Hausas, with old Sergeant Momo Assar at their head! Oh, to hear the swish of steel and the sharp, short snap as the bayonets were unsheathed and fixed! What bayonet-play they would make among the Bhutumas, with their "long point—short point—jab!" . . .

"Fix . . . bayonets!"

Lieutenant McFee started, and endeavored to shake off the torpor into which his mind had fallen. Had he

spoken his thoughts aloud? Or were his senses playing him false under the terrible strain?

The crash of a disciplined volley, a rush of feet, the sound of the Hausa charging-yell, told him it was no delusion. When he opened his eyes it was to see the lion stretched lifeless on the ground, together with most of the slaver's guards; while the remainder stood huddled together, covered by the rifles of a score of Hausas.

But the White Vampire was nowhere to be seen.

IMMEDIATELY upon being released McFee set a guard on the door of the pyramid, and then with an armed party instituted a thorough search of the maze of passages and cell-like rooms with which the main temple was surrounded. This, although a protracted task, was far from being a tedious one. It is impossible to feel bored when your next step may be greeted with a shot at close quarters.

That Ishak-El-Naga would make a desperate fight for life when discovered seemed almost certain; but the scene which actually followed took McFee entirely by surprize. Pushing open a heavy teak door at the end of one of the passages, he found the slave-dealer standing in the center of a room which, unlike the others he had visited, was richly furnished and lighted by hanging lamps. He made not the slightest movement until McFee had covered him with a ready revolver and ordered him to put his hands up. Then he merely lifted his shoulders a fraction of an inch and smiled.

"I expected your coming, Englishman," he said indifferently, as he pointed to two ivory-handled Colts and a long curved sword lying on the table beside him. "There are my weapons. I am your prisoner. But first I demand to know the crimes with which I am accused."

"They are many, Ishak-El-Naga," said McFee sternly; and for the next five minutes he recited a catalogue which sickened him merely to repeat.

At the conclusion the Arab gave an elaborate yawn. "What have I to do with these crimes?" he asked wearily. "By your own showing they were committed by an unknown person who goes by the name of 'The White Vampire'."

Lieutenant McFee pointed an accusing finger at his prisoner.

"The White Vampire was—*yourself!*" he cried.

Ishak-El-Naga threw back his head and uttered a scornful laugh.

"Prove that to the judges at Lokoja!" he sneered. "Tell them thy fable of a veiled spirit who enslaved thousands by the mere terror of her name. Bah! the English require proof—not empty words! They will laugh thy accusation to scorn!" He drew himself up with an air of defiance. "Take me to Lokoja. I am ready to face my trial."

For a full minute Lieutenant McFee stared at the man in silence. For the wily Arab spoke no more than the truth. There was not a shred of actual proof against him. If he accused him, the case would assuredly fail. And yet—was this monster to escape scot-free? The vision of Inyoni's death-agony rose before the eyes of the lieutenant and his features set in an expression which caused the watchful Ishak to quail.

"Thou art mistaken, O Hadj," he said in a voice of terrible calm. "Thy judges are not at Lokoja. They are here."

"Here?" gasped the Arab. "Who are they?"

"Thy victims!" was the answer. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hands of thy slaves, that they may do with thee what they will."

Ishak recoiled a pace and his face appeared suddenly gray.

"But they will torture me!—I shall die by inches!" he almost screamed. "You—you dare not do

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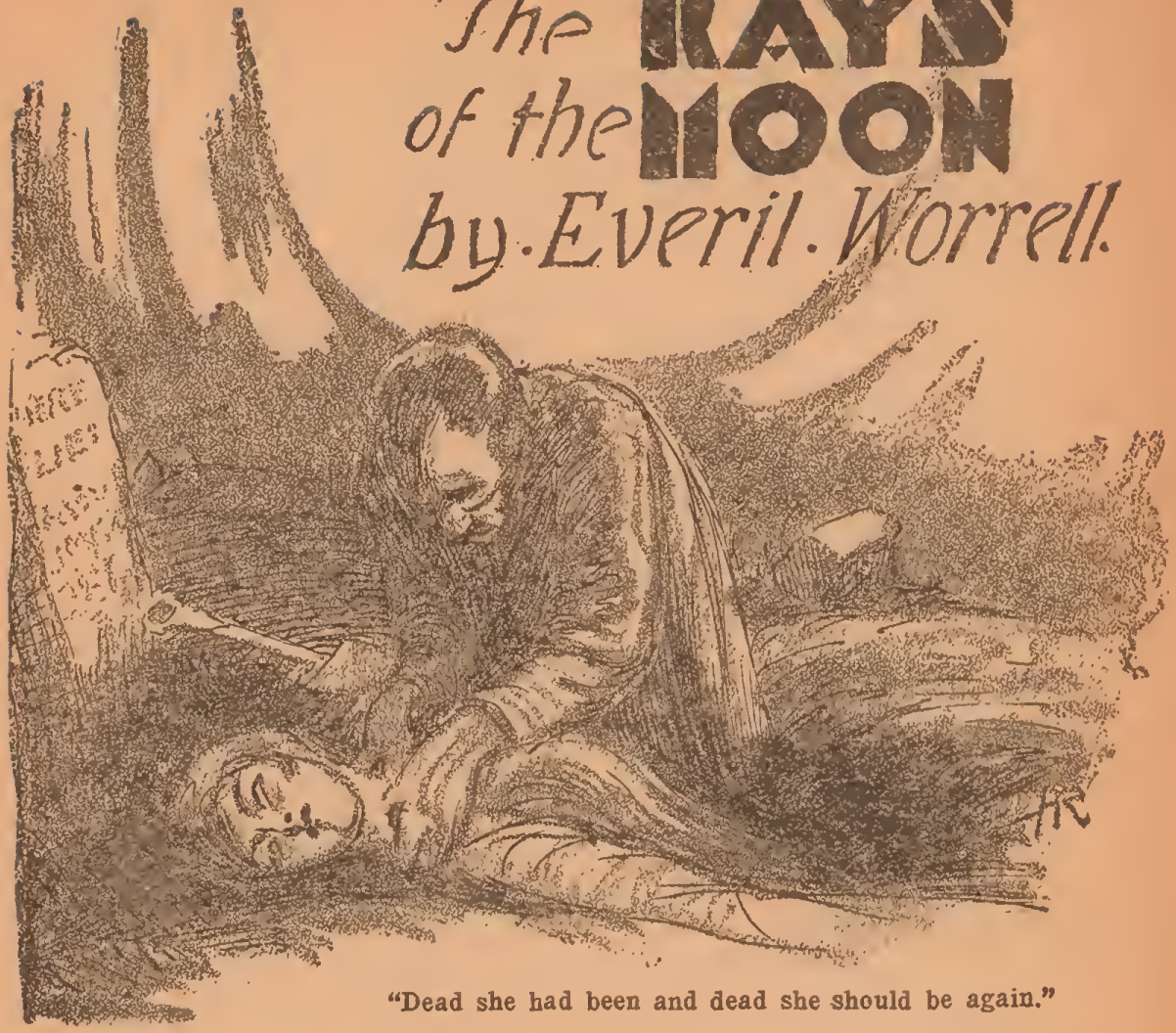
The RAYS of the MOON

by Everil Worrell



"Dead she had been and dead she should be again."

FOR hours I had lain hidden behind the gravestone. I was a medical student—and I needed a cadaver.

My pal and I had always been different from our classmates. We would have departed from the ways of other doctors, too, had we gone on to practise our profession. In our class there were men who have given their lives in the service of humanity—but we would have made humanity serve us. We aspired to fame, to the making of spectacular discoveries, perhaps—and we would have stopped not for fear or mercy. How quickly we would have been expelled from the college in which we were enrolled, had our standards of conduct been made known to our fellow students and instructors!

Well, it would not matter now if we had been expelled. Better for us if we had been. My pal died of septicemia—the revenge, perhaps, of the corpse he was working on in the close-shuttered basement of his house when his knife slipped and infected his hand. For that corpse had been walking on two feet only a week before, the healthy body of a charwoman who worked in the medical school building, and whose naturally appointed time to die had not yet come.

Ah, well! The charwoman's disappearance created hardly a ripple of interest, and Browne's death not much more.

And now I lay hidden through hours of darkness in a large, well-filled cemetery not far from the outskirts of a city. The city was not the one in which I lived and pursued my studies. For caution's sake, I had driven more than forty miles. Yet I was familiar with the countryside, for six months before I had passed this way often, on my way to the home of a girl to whom I was engaged. I had loved this girl until I became sure of her affection, and then I tired of her. Besides, I had given my allegiance to morphia, and had become unsocial. After I wearied of her it became a monotonous thing to know that she loved me, and so I broke my engagement. A few months later her brother called on me, begging that I go to see his sister, if only once more. She was a delicate, sensitive, high-strung girl, not very strong. My treatment of her, he said, had broken her heart, and her family actually believed her to be dying of grief. Her brother was not very courteous to me, for he had gotten the idea that a little kindness from me might save his sister's life.

"You may not be a murderer, but you have the heart of a murderer," he said to me.

I laughed at him, and never went near the girl again. That sort of thing is ridiculous! No girl with any sense pines away and dies of disillusionment and lost love in this day and age, as I told him. I had no time to waste in considering her feelings. And a girl who would have so little pride as to do such an unreasonable thing would be better dead, in any case. I told him that, too; and he went away and left me alone, and I never again traveled that road until I went to tear from a new-made grave its quiet tenant.

I had gone there in the early evening, in order to reconnoiter. It was a cloudy night, and although the moon was full, it would be hard to locate the fresh grave I hoped to find, after dark. I might have carried a flashlight, but I had not the nerve for that. A moving light in a graveyard at night is more likely to attract the curious than to terrify chance passers-by and send them hurrying away, as would have been the case a century ago.

Driving slowly past, I got the lie of the land, and then drove on. I had seen what I wanted to see—a mound of fresh earth, far in from the road. I parked the car a little way down in a side road and walked back, climbed the low fence and crept to my place of vigil, and waited. I wanted the road empty and deserted, but I wanted to leave myself plenty of time to rearrange the despoiled grave before dawn, and to get the heavy burden I expected to take away with me safely hidden in the bottom of my car. I did not care very much what kind of body I would find in the new-made grave. Man, woman or child—I was going to use the brain for some experimental work, and the brain of one was as good as the brain of another.

While I waited, I had added a new mark to the many tiny puncture marks my pocket hypodermic had left upon my arm. With a strong shot of morphine in my veins, time had gone pleasantly and fast.

As I started to dig, the clouds thinned overhead, and a faint, ghostly light shone down upon me. Accustomed as my eyes were to the darkness, I could do without the light, and I did not like it. True, it was hardly strong enough to make me visible, even from a short distance. But it had an unwholesome, sickly quality that preyed upon my spirits. To me a corpse was just a corpse—but why is it that ghosts are always said to be seen by the light of the moon? For every ghost-story in which the moon is not mentioned, there are a thousand in which it is. Digging into this grave in the dark-

ness, I had experienced no more emotion than, in my boyhood, I had felt on digging into a hill of potatoes. We had needed potatoes for dinner, and I had taken a spade and dug into a hill after them. I needed a body, and I was digging into its hill after it. But with the coming of this unwelcome, eery half-light, I began to feel a chill creep up my spine.

I tried to laugh it off, to see my adventure again in its true perspective. I needed a corpse, and here, beneath my spade, was one that was going to waste. It was dead enough. It would not be annoyed, and the people who had placed it here in the heart of the cemetery could adorn the grave with flowers just the same, thinking there was that beneath them which perhaps occupied, in part, various alcohol-pickle jars.

I caught myself up with a shudder. My bravado was going too far. Instead of reassuring myself, I would unbalance my nerves.

Just then my spade struck something hard, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Now to get it over! Since I had gotten myself into this uneasy, shivery state, the quicker I proceeded the better. I had brought tools to force the coffin lid. I meant to replace the coffin, and throw in the dirt. I had brought a bundle of gunny sack to wrap the body in. It would be a serious enough thing for me if I were observed carrying my burden to the car, but better wrapped than unwrapped. A curious observer might possibly give me the benefit of the doubt in the first case, and pass on speculating.

I worked hard, now, the perspiration standing out all over my body from my efforts and my excitement.

I DUG out the coffin, and, straining every muscle, lifted it out. And just here an actual physical giddiness seized me. I had a sudden feeling as though the yawning hole at my feet were infinitely deep—as though I stood precariously upon the earth, and might slip from my footing and fall endlessly into some horrible abyss. I was overcome by the feeling of *space*—though why this should be, as I looked down into the hole I had dug, I can not say.

I knelt by the coffin and with shaking hand attacked the lid with my tools. Prying, wrenching, hurrying more and more, I threw the lid aside, at last, with a muffled clang. The dim light of the cloud-covered moon faded at this moment, and it was as dark as I could wish. Little comforted, however, I made no attempt to inspect my prize. I could see that it was a woman, who had been buried in a white dress. The face was no more than a white blur, but I had—I, the cold-blooded, intellectual resurrectionist—I had a feeling as though it *saw* me. Hastily snatching one of the gunny sacks I had at hand, I wrapped it around the head, shrinking a little from the clammy touch of lifeless hair and flesh where my bare hand came in contact with them.

I had time to wonder at the strength of my nervous revulsion of feeling—only for a moment. Only for a moment, and then the clouds parted, as if at a signal, and the moon shone out. God, what a sight met my horrified eyes!

It was midnight, for the moon was full, and it stood in the exact zenith of the sky. It shone directly down on me, and on the pitiful figure of the dead that I had torn from its last earthly refuge. It shone into the yawning grave, and seemed to gather there in a pool, to fill it as it filled the vast dome of the sky. There seemed to be no bottom to the grave, and this was so strange a thing that I reeled and would have fallen to the ground, overcome again by the dizziness I had felt before. Suppose the feeling of fixed attachment to the earth should fail you—that the bonds of gravity should not seem to hold you firmly—

and you can imagine something of the physical sensations that beset me. But you can form no image of the mental agony, the mental horror—for I have not told you all.

I say I *would* have fallen to the ground. I did not, for even as the desperate dizziness assailed me, a greater horror assailed me also, and I could not fall. It seemed to me that the pale but brilliant rays of the moon had taken hold of me, as the invisible power of a magnet takes hold upon a piece of steel. As the sickening feeling struck me that the earth was, somehow, letting me slip away—fall away into the hollow ether—so, a second later, it seemed to me that I was upborne by a force to which I did not willingly submit. I could not fall, because the moon was directly overhead, and because it held me, drew me, as the tide draws the sea.

Who can explain the mysteries of matter? The sea follows the moon; why not, then, our corporeal bodies, which are made up largely of water? Are there not tides within us which we should feel? On this night, the moon was drawing *me*, with a resistless, inexorable attraction. I was being drawn upward, so that I could not fall. I was being drawn upward, so that I felt less and less the pressure of my feet upon the earth—more and more that horrible dizziness, the dizziness of space. I was being drawn upward as a mote is drawn into a vacuum.

And surely, that were enough—but it was not all, nor was it the worst. For the still figure lying at my feet—the white-clad figure with the gunny sack incongruously wrapped around its head and face—that figure, too, was being drawn upward. It was rising slowly from the ground, swinging a little, almost imperceptibly, into an upright position. In I know not how long a time, while I stood motionless as though frozen into stone, watching its stiff gyration through the air, it assumed, finally, an upright posture, and stood facing me—facing me, with the horrible, gunny-shrouded head opposite mine, as though it were peering out, perhaps, through some thin spot in the coarse fabric.

Suddenly my own voice piereed the night in a frantic shriek that seemed to echo among the low white stones and massive monuments. I had screamed out in a nightmarish feeling that what was happening could not be real. And then I clapped my hand over my mouth in a very ecstasy of terror. For all around me, a doleful moaning proceeded from the graves. And above every grave in the vast acreage gorged with the rotting corpses of the dead, the sod was billowing—swelling outward, as though a mighty struggle took place beneath the surface of the earth.

There is a passage in the Scriptures, in which the evil-doer implores the hills to fall upon him. Maddened by my frantic terror, this passage flashed into my mind. I wanted to take refuge from the unnatural horrors surrounding me; from the merciless, pale light that displayed them to me, and —horrible thought!—that exposed me to them. Another moment, I thought, and the dead will leap out from their tombs and fall upon me in vengeance for desecrating the city belonging to the dead. And still I had the desperate feeling that the rays of the moon exercised a potent attraction upon my body, as though I were about to be swept entirely off my feet by them, and drawn upward into space.

The open grave before me appeared in that awful moment as a refuge. But between me and it swayed that upright figure—the figure of the corpse I had dragged out of it, with its head swathed in the coarse bag I had drawn over it. I leaped madly forward, my hands out-thrust to push that figure aside, to hurl it to the ground—and as I leaped, I felt that I was rushing *upward*. The cemetery with its long rows of mounds and gravestones fell away from me.

Around me I was conscious of nothing but the misty flood of moonlight, and the horrible figure I had sought to thrust from me—the rigid body of the dead woman, which still confronted me with its faceless, bundled head. Then I plunged into unconsciousness.

AS ONE recovering from a swoon, I felt the powers of thought and feeling return to me. Slowly and wearily they came back. I knew, before I remembered the horrors of which I have just written, that they were no kindly gift. Better an eternity of unconsciousness; I did not want to think and feel again.

Heavily, impelled by an urge that could not be longer denied, I lifted the lids from my aching eyes. And for a merciful moment, I thought I was alone.

Where? I was not, thank God, in the cemetery. Those countless heaving mounds of earth that should have lain quietly over their decaying contents were not around me now. But *where* I was, and in what manner of place, was quite beyond me.

Imagine a desert of white sand, hemmed in by mountains white, but not of the sparkling whiteness of snow—of the whiteness, rather, of bare, bleached bone; and yet this desert was not of sand, for instead of tiny particles, the floor of the plain on which I lay was rather like bare, bleached bone, too. There was a deathliness about the very substance of which plain and near-by mountains were formed, which is indescribable. There was a deathliness in the silence of the place. There was a deathliness in the absence of motion, in the absence of color; even the sky was colorless, although it was dead black. But there were glaring lights hung in that black sky—not stars! Surely, no stars shone down on any part of the earth's globe, as these lights shone.

Somehow, they terrified me, those glaring, tiny points of light, thick-strewn against the blackness, varying in the colors of their flames, distant yet overpowering in the intensity of the rays they hurled against my retinas.

Has it ever occurred to you to think of the panic into which you would be thrown if the consistency of a single law of nature failed you? Imagine, for instance, that your optic nerve suddenly forgot to register perspective in transmitting images to your brain, as it has been trained from boyhood to do. Imagine your terror at the growing immensity of a housefly, darting toward your eyes, blotting out the world with its black body and spreading wings. So it was that the strangeness of those awful stars, shining down on me, terrified me.

As I turned my head so that I could see more of the heavens—my arm, lying across my face, had shown me but a small sector of them before, although I had been able to see my nearer surroundings by looking beneath it—a sight burst upon my vision which I can never forget. If I were to live through indescribable tortures for a thousand years, even then the wonder of it would not fade from my memory.

In the midst of the heavens hung two glorious orbs: the one, the first glimpses of which all but blinded me, a blazing mass of flame; the other, a beautiful disk shining with a softer light, on which there was a faint tracery which reminded me of the schoolroom globe on which, years ago, I had studied the oceans and continents. The rim of this disk had a softened, slightly blurred appearance, which added to its beauty. And the whole disk was large—perhaps some four or five times larger than the full moon is.

And now, my mind and vision began to correlate my observations. Those burning stars and that ball of flame that glared upon me, as though the softening veil of air had been withdrawn from between them and my eyes; the familiar, maplike tracery

of that enormous sphere, with the softer outline which set it apart from everything else within the range of my vision; those baldly glaring peaks towering around me on every side—their glaring outlines sharply cut against the dead, black sky—their contours wild, fantastic, like the shapes of the mountains of the moon——

I uttered a wild shriek, and fell upon my face. I was panting madly. An unbelievably awful conviction had swept over me. That dreadful, drawing feeling which the moon's rays had exercised upon me—my swooning memory of slipping from the earth——

I was not on the earth. The earth hung there, beautiful as a lost paradise, in the sky above me. I was on the moon, among the desolate, dead mountains of the moon. The veil of air had indeed vanished from before the faces of the stars, for the moon was as airless as it was lifeless. There was no air for me to breathe—no air for me to breathe! That thought in that moment eclipsed all other thoughts. Prostrate, I groveled, I gasped, I threw out my arms. My lungs seemed laboring madly, my chest expanded as though it would burst.

Then something touched me, from which, even in that desperate moment, I shrank away. And there came to my ears a sort of soundless voice—no voice such as we of earth know voices, yet some impulse which seemed to impinge tonelessly upon my eardrums, and which my brain translated into words.

"*This* distress is needless," said the voice. "You are suffering from an idea. A disembodied spirit—an astral body—needs no air to breathe."

Relieved of my instant physical terror, I was at once the victim of a more subtle, more excruciating anguish. I need not fear to die! No; for this—*this was death!*

I had been in the moonlit graveyard in the hour when the dead wake, and ghosts "walk." And I had become one of that dread company. My body, not swooning, but lifeless, lay in the cemetery—perhaps it had fallen into the grave toward which I had leaped. But I, unknowing, had parted from it and from the fair earth, and had fallen under other bonds.

I got to my feet; turned in that direction from which it seemed to me those words had proceeded; raised my head—and dropped it lower, not to see.

Not to see! For in the lifeless desolation around me, I had one companion—the rigid figure of the dead woman with the shrouded head!

Twice, then, I sought to flee; and twice the grisly Thing confronted me.

At last I sank down in a hopeless, ultimate despair.

If this were death, and I a spirit, moving in an astral body—I had heard of such things, and had laughed quite merrily at them—then this companionship in death seemed to be ordained. For the present, there was no escape from it. And so, for a while, time passed, while I sat motionless, brooding, in an inaction which, it seemed, might endure for all eternity. And while the radiant vision that was the earth with its teeming nations of living men, turning the passing instants to good or evil, showed a changing face—for the faint traceries of continents slipped aside and another hemisphere began to appear—that other figure waited.

At last I summoned all my fortitude and spoke to it. Better the emptiness of a dead planet than its company, and yet—it had occurred to me that I might learn of it, since it seemed, after its brief tenancy of the grave, more versed than I in the way of death.

I shrank anew from the sound of my own voice, which sounded toneless as that other voice had sounded. But somehow I asked where were the other dead.

"*Space* is the pit into which the souls of dead men fall," was the pitiless answer. "By God's mercy, some are saved—but you, standing at midnight by the open grave from which you dragged my unwilling body, are not a candidate for God's mercy, in your present state.

"I—I may be one, perhaps. I am on a mission, now. And even you—since it is for your sake that I was sent on it, there may be hope for you. Later I shall speak of that.

"The dead who are lost in space are drawn to the moon, which exerts a compelling power upon their astral bodies. That is why spirits sometimes appear to living men in the pallid light of the encircling satellite. When the light of the moon is turned from the earth, the dead can not easily revisit it; but when it bathes the earth in its radiance, they are sometimes able to follow the rays of moonlight to the planet that was their home. So they sometimes reanimate their abandoned physical bodies—the graves in the cemetery tonight were disturbed by the efforts of bodies and souls to reunite."

Suddenly I was seized with a desire to know more. Even my terror was held in abeyance by my longing to understand more of the mysteries of death.

"There should be other dead around us, then," I said. "Why do I not see all of them, as well as you?"

"The sight would unseat your reason, and you have still a chance to undo some of the evil you have done," came the reply. "Besides, few of the dead concern you. To the dead who wander here, only the evil they have done is real. *Look!*"

Obedient to the pointing finger, I turned.

"There, before me now, appeared the shadowy form of my pal—of Browne, who had kidnaped and murdered the old charwoman, and had died of septicemia. And beside him, ghastly with a cruel hole in the head, was the woman.

I shrank away, and as Browne held out his hands to me in pleading, I made a threatening gesture which repelled him. Slowly the vision faded, and again my only companion in the desolate place was the figure with the shrouded head.

"That was not well done, nor was it well-omened," said the monotonous voice. "You would not have seen him, but for the fact that you encouraged him along his evil way. True, you were ignorant of the murder until it was accomplished. Yet I tell you that but for your influence upon his life on earth, it would never have been committed. It was not well done to cast him from you. He is not evil incarnate, but only the lost soul of an evil-doer, and little worse than you."

Once more I was the victim of an unreasoning terror. During my whole life I had refused to hold myself accountable to any law, human or divine. I had made my rules of life, and succeeded in "getting away with them." Now there was a deadliness of import in the words I had just listened to, which I did not understand; they implied that in some awful way I was at last to be brought to book—confronted with a terrible reckoning. Perhaps an eternity of this——

I was desperate, and in my despair I grew bold.

"Unloose that covering from your head," I cried. "It is horrible to me. I can not stand to see it. I would rather see your face!"

Somehow, I felt the unseen gaze that greeted my outburst. I felt the approach of a horror, unseen, unknown.

"The time is not yet. Your hands put this covering upon my head, and over my dead face; roughly they put it there, to hide your wrongdoing from the eyes of men. Your hands

shall remove it—but the time is not yet.

"And be not surprized if the sight of my face is more terrible to you than this that hides it from you."

I held my hands before my eyes, and sank again upon the ground. And again it seemed as though eternity were passing, without life or motion, with nothing to look forward to but the dread reality of death.

Yet it could not have been long before I felt again the unwelcome touch upon my shoulder. For when I drew back from it and leaped to my feet, the continent that had been slipping away toward the rim of the earth was still visible. On that part of it which had been my mortal home, the moon was setting. Longingly I strained my eyes upward.

Oh, to know again the joy of a sunrise on the earth! The wholesomeness of things that lived—of things that had their lives to turn to good account! To be again a living man among my fellows, with the right to *hope*—to spend my days in worthy things, and to hope that at the end of them I might have earned the right to another fate than this upon which I had fallen!

Once more the specter approached me.

"Come, it is time to go, before that open grave has turned away from the moon. We are to go back there, you and I together. I told you, there is yet a chance for you! We are to go back, and you have yet more time to spend on earth. See that you use each moment to good account, for perhaps the first few moments of your return may decide eternity for you. Come, you must go back with me, into the grave."

Into the grave!

I could not have prevented my shudder at that, if that alone had cost me my salvation.

"I told you, you should not have shrunk from Browne. It will be better now, not to shrink from me. You dragged me from the grave into which they put me—why should you not take me back there? Who are you, a soul steeped in sin, that you should spurn the company of the stolen, lifeless body you would have violated in your laboratory? You would have dissected it—severed bone and thew and sinew. Instead, it is a part of your reparation to resume your earth life in that grave—with me."

I had no time to question farther. The deadly, sickening dizziness of space had seized upon me. In some mysterious manner, or by some dispensation, we were to be borne back on the rays of the moon that had swept me from my living body, as the tide is lifted above the barriers that hold the sea at ebb.

And the Thing from which I had shrunk since that moment in which I felt the earth slipping from me—the Thing for which I had developed an unspeakable repulsion—that Thing was with me, pressing close beside me, turning its hateful hidden face toward me, as my senses swam and faded into unconsciousness.

IN MY mind there was, at first, little more than a confusion of memories. I seemed to have looked down upon my own body, lying in the bottom of the grave which I myself had opened, in a sickly glimmer that might have been reflected from the long beams of the sinking moon, or might have been a phosphorescence of the damp earth. In that open grave, partly resting on my body, there was another that bore it down—a gruesome thing of death between me and the open air.

I seemed to have seen this, but in a second instant, it became rather *feeling*, than seeing.

I lay heavily pressed against the damp ground that was the bottom of the grave. The horrible thing was with me there; a fold of that gunny sack I had used to hide its face when first I dragged it from its coffin lay

across my mouth and nostrils. I seemed to inhale the very air of death and of decay.

I was weak, and my first struggles were futile. Only one thing in the world could have been more appalling—to be buried alive. I seemed, even, to taste of the horror of that. Somehow my arms were pinioned beneath me, so that for long moments I could not even free my face. I began to think that I would die, here, in the open tomb with this dead body, and that someone might come and hastily throw down the dirt and sod upon us both.

Spurred by this unreasoning terror, my strength began to return. I raised myself to a sitting posture. I breathed freely. I began to prepare for the effort of climbing out of the grave.

But what awful sound assailed my ears?

Surely, the quiet form that lay at my feet was waking too. The occupant of the grave, that had lain there many hours before my coming, was doing that most horrible, unnatural thing—returning to life after its burial.

And I, alone, nerve-shattered, horror-stricken—I was the sole witness of the dread sight.

The bosom of the dead girl moved beneath the folds of her burial gown. The whole form stirred. Long sighs and deep groans burst from the unseen lips.

I gathered all my energies for flight.

Let life reanimate the corpse before me—I would not stay to see the awful drama. I *dared* not stay. It would be ruinous to be found here, to be known as the violator of the grave. If I lingered, someone would come. If I lingered and this returning life were not transient, then the corpse itself could condemn me. True, I would have been the unwitting means of giving it a second chance at life—but it would surely be known in what manner I came to have done so. The dead woman who was agonizing her way back to life might not even thank me for my part in her return; her suffering seemed dreadful, now, and, since she had once passed the portals of the grave, this reawakening might be as unwelcome to her as it was to me.

I was clambering to my feet, when I felt a clammy, damp, yet unbelievably strong hand close upon my ankle. I tripped and stumbled, and could not get away.

Helping itself by clinging to me with both hands, now, the body of the woman who had been dead rose slowly to a sitting posture.

A smothered, stumbling, thick-tongued speech greeted my unwilling ear.

"So this was why—was why—my last request, not to be embalmed. I knew. I must have known. Something told me, that I must come back. Yet I did not want to come back! You—you—ah, why is the grave open? It was you opened it—but not for my sake. *Morton!*"

Spellbound, I waited. The voice was changing, becoming more lifelike. As it spoke my name in accents of dread import, it was familiar. *This woman who was buried yesterday knew me!*

Suddenly, a shriek pierced the still air of dawn. "Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid! I died, unhappy to the end, longing for one last glimpse of your face. I wake here in my own grave—and you are here. But you are as hard now as you were then. You came—you came—oh, I remember how you told me once, that some day you would rob a grave. I thought it was a horrid jest—I thought you meant to frighten me. It was true—*it was true, and you came to rob my grave!* Oh, I am afraid to be here alone, alone in a grave. You shall stay with me—I will scream until someone hears me, and you shall stay here until they come. No, I will not let you go. I

am afraid to be alone. You shall stay, and I will tell what you have done—I will tell, and you shall be punished for *that*——"

Frantically I strove to free myself from the grip of those clinging hands.

It was in vain to plead, to threaten, to reason. I snatched the gunny sacking, at last, from the head of the girl who knelt at my feet. But it was dreadful to look upon the face of this girl who had loved me. It was dreadful that we should have met thus; a thing unspeakably dreadful, a thing outside all human experience.

God! Why should it have been *her* grave?

And in her eyes, I read that she was on the verge of madness.

No arguments would serve; she would not listen. No appeals to her old love for me could move her; waking within the narrow limits of her grave, there was room in her brain, room in her heart, for but two things —fear and vengeance.

Outside, the light was growing. Soon people would be passing along the road. They would see from afar the open grave with the coffin lying beside it, and the heaped-up earth. They would enter—and hear the things she was saying.

What they would do to me, I did not know. At the very least, my life would be ruined. I could never practise my profession. I could never occupy my place in the world again.

And suddenly, the girl at my feet began to scream.

THERE was but one thing to do, and I did it. Dead she had been, dead she should be again. I seized the slender throat in my hands. . . .

Although she had seemed so strong, the life so newly returned was easily banished. Almost at once, I felt her grow limp in my grip.

There was not time to rearrange the grave. There was only time to fly.

Of course, there was a great mystery about it. A grave had been opened, presumably by body-snatchers, and the body of the girl who had been buried there the day before was found lying in the bottom of it, while the open coffin rested on the ground outside. Strangest of all, the corpse had not been taken away, but it showed signs of violence, marks upon the throat that had not been there before.

I have saved myself from disgrace, but I have given up my profession. Death frightens me too much. I can not endure the presence of the dead or dying.

I have changed. Surely I have changed! After my headlong flight from the cemetery, I remembered the things that had happened to me. I had fallen, fainting, into the grave, dragging down with me the corpse. That is, my physical body had fallen into the grave—but something that was I had been drawn upward, beyond the limits of the earth, into the realm of death.

Never do I see the full moon shining from the midheavens without a shudder. I hide away from its rays. It is as horrible to me as a corpse.

Was it fantasy—a nightmarish hallucination that visited my brain between swooning and waking? I should say so, for I was to be a doctor. The profession I was not fit to practise would agree that it was so, for they would seize upon a natural explanation.

I managed, prompted by a ghastly curiosity, to verify the words of the reanimated corpse with regard to its embalmment. The girl who had died of a broken heart had had a horror of embalmment—she had indeed made the unusual request that her body be buried without it. I could, then, assume that she might have been buried alive; that her departed spirit had not journeyed from the earth with mine its unwilling companion, but that she had been buried and laid in the grave in a state of coma.

This would explain it all—explain it naturally. And then, there was the shot of morphine I had taken in the evening, which might have overcome my senses and inflicted a wild vision upon my inflamed brain. Then, too, there is a moon-madness that is known to the tropics. Perhaps some might say that the rays of the moon shining more strongly than is their wont in our temperate clime had maddened me.

But the horror that lives on with me is too real. The memory is too vivid. Too well do I remember certain doom-laden words: "The first few moments of your return may decide eternity for you."

I know that for the space of that night, two lifeless bodies lay in that open grave. I know my memory of that night is no fantasy, but the awful truth, and that in driving forth by violence the returning spirit from that other body, I made an eternal choice.

I, who had been told that I had the heart of a murderer, have become that most awful thing—a murderer!

I wait for death, which will come some day to me, with a dread beyond description. I no longer believe, as once I believed, that death is the end. I believe it is the beginning—*the beginning, for the evil-doer, of an eternity of the horror of death.*

The Burial of the Rats

By BRAM STOKER

LEAVING Paris by the Orleans road, cross the Enceinte, and, turning to the right, you find yourself in a somewhat wild and not at all savory district. Right and left, before and behind, on every side rise great heaps of dust, the waste accumulated by the process of time.

Paris has its night as well as its day life, and the sojourner who enters his hotel in the Rue de Rivoli or the Rue St. Honoré late at night or leaves it early in the morning, can guess, in coming near Montrouge—if he has not done so already—the purpose of those great wagons that look like boilers on wheels which he finds halting everywhere as he passes.

Every city has its peculiar institutions created out of its own needs; and one of the most notable institutions of Paris is its rag-picking population. In the early morning—and Parisian life commences at an early

hour—may be seen in most streets standing on the pathway opposite every court and alley and between every few houses, as still in some American cities, even in parts of New York, large wooden boxes into which the domestics or tenement-holders empty the accumulated dust of the past day. Round these boxes gather and pass on, when the work is done, to fresh fields of labor and pastures new, squalid, hungry-looking men and women, the implements of whose craft consist of a coarse bag or basket slung over the shoulder and a little rake with which they turn over and probe and examine in the minutest manner the dust bins. They pick up and deposit in their baskets, by aid of their rakes, whatever they may find, with the same facility as a Chinaman uses his chopsticks.

Paris is a city of centralization—and centralization and classification are closely allied. In the early times, when centralization is becoming a fact, its forerunner is classification. All things which are similar or analogous become grouped together, and from the grouping of groups rises one whole or central point. We see radiating many long arms with innumerable tentaculæ, and in the center rises a gigantic head with a comprehensive brain and keen eyes to look on every side and ears sensitive to hear—and a voracious mouth to swallow.

Other cities resemble all the birds and beasts and fishes whose appetites and digestions are normal. Paris alone is the analogical apotheosis of the octopus. Product of centralization carried on *ad absurdum,* it fairly represents the devil-fish; and in no respects is the resemblance more curious than in the similarity of the digestive apparatus.

Those intelligent tourists who, having surrendered their individuality into the hands of Messrs. Cook or Gaze, "do" Paris in three days, are often puzzled to know how it is that the dinner which in London would cost about six shillings, can be had for three francs in a café in the Palais Royal. They need have no more wonder if they will but consider the classification which is a theoretic specialty of Parisian life, and adopt all round the fact from which the rag-picker has his genesis.

The Paris of 1850 was not like the Paris of today, and those who see the Paris of Napoleon and Baron Hausseman can hardly realize the existence of the state of things forty-five years ago.

Amongst other things, however, which have not changed are those districts where the waste is gathered. Dust is dust all the world over, in every age, and the family likeness of dust-heaps is perfect. The traveler, therefore, who visits the environs of Montrouge can go back in fancy without difficulty to the year 1850.

In this year I was making a prolonged stay in Paris. I was very much in love with a young lady who, though she returned my passion, so far yielded to the wishes of her parents that she had promised not to see me or to correspond with me for a year. I, too, had been compelled to accede to these conditions under a vague hope of parental approval. During the term of probation I had promised to remain out of the country and not to write to my dear one until the expiration of the year.

Naturally the time went heavily with me. There was no one of my own family or circle who could tell me of Alice, and none of her own folk had, I am sorry to say, sufficient generosity to send me even an occasional word of comfort regarding her health and well-being. I spent six months wandering about Europe, but as I could find no satisfactory distraction in travel, I determined to come to Paris, where, at least, I would be within easy hail of London in case any good fortune should call me thither before the appointed time.

That "hope deferred maketh the heart sick" was never better exemplified than in my case, for in addition to the perpetual longing to see the face I loved there was always with me a harrowing anxiety lest some accident should prevent me showing Alice in due time that I had, throughout the long period of probation, been faithful to her trust and my own love. Thus, every adventure which I undertook had a fierce pleasure of its own, for it was fraught with possible consequences greater than it would have ordinarily borne.

Like all travelers I exhausted the places of most interest in the first month of my stay, and was driven in the second month to look for amusement whithersoever I might. Having made sundry journeys to the better-known suburbs, I began to see that there was a *terra incognita,* in so far as the guide book was concerned, in the social wilderness lying between these attractive points. Accordingly I began to systematize my researches, and each day took up the thread of my exploration at the place where I had on the previous day dropped it.

In process of time my wanderings led me near Montrouge, and I saw that hereabouts lay the Ultima Thule of social exploration—a country as little known as that round the source of the White Nile. And so I determined to investigate philosophically the chiffonier—his habitat, his life, and his means of life.

The job was an unsavory one, difficult of accomplishment, and with little hope of adequate reward. However, despite reason, obstinacy prevailed, and I entered into my new investigation with a keener energy than I could have summoned to aid me in any investigation leading to any end, valuable or worthy.

One day, late in a fine afternoon, toward the end of September, I entered the holy of holies of the city of dust. The place was evidently the recognized abode of a number of chiffoniers, for some sort of arrangement was manifested in the formation of the dust heaps near the road. I passed amongst these heaps, which stood like orderly sentries, determined to penetrate farther and trace dust to its ultimate location.

As I passed along I saw behind the dust heaps a few forms that flitted to and fro, evidently watching with interest the advent of any stranger to such a place. The district was like a small Switzerland, and as I went forward my tortuous course shut out the path behind me.

Presently I got into what seemed a small city or community of chiffoniers. There were a number of shanties or huts, such as may be met with in the remote parts of the Bog of Allan—rude places with wattled walls, plastered with mud and roofs of rude thatch made from stable refuse—such places as one would not like to enter for any consideration, and which even in water-color could look picturesque only if judiciously treated. In the midst of these huts was one of the strangest adaptations—I can not say habitations—I had ever seen. An immense old wardrobe, the colossal remnant of some boudoir of Charles VII or Henry II, had been converted into a dwelling-house. The double doors lay open, so that the entire menage was open to public view. In the open half of the wardrobe was a common sitting-room of some four feet by six, in which sat, smoking their pipes round a charcoal brazier, no fewer than six old soldiers of the First Republic, with their uniforms torn and worn threadbare. Evidently they were of the *mauvais sujet* class; their blear eyes and limp jaws told plainly of a common love of absinthe; and their eyes had that haggard, worn look which stamps the drunkard at his worst, and that look of slumbering ferocity which follows hard in the wake of drink. The other side stood as of old, with its

shelves intact, save that they were cut to half their depth, and in each shelf, of which there were six, was a bed made with rags and straw. The half-dozen of worthies who inhabited this structure looked at me curiously as I passed; and when I looked back after going a little way I saw their heads together in a whispered conference. I did not like the look of this at all, for the place was very lonely, and the men looked very, very villainous. However, I did not see any cause for fear, and went on my way, penetrating farther and farther into the Sahara. The way was tortuous to a degree, and from going round in a series of semicircles, as one goes in skating with the Dutch roll, I got rather confused with regard to the points of the compass.

When I had penetrated a little way I saw, as I turned the corner of a half-made heap, sitting on a heap of straw an old soldier with threadbare coat.

"Hallo!" said I to myself; "the First Republic is well represented here in its soldiery."

As I passed him the old man never even looked up at me, but gazed on the ground with stolid persistency. Again I remarked to myself: "See what a life of rude warfare can do! This old man's curiosity is a thing of the past."

When I had gone a few steps, however, I looked back suddenly, and saw that curiosity was not dead, for the veteran had raised his head and was regarding me with a very queer expression. He seemed to me to look very like one of the six worthies in the press. When he saw me looking he dropped his head; and without thinking further of him I went on my way, satisfied that there was a strange likeness between these old warriors.

Presently I met another old soldier in a similar manner. He, too, did not notice me whilst I was passing.

By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and I began to think of retracing my steps. Accordingly I turned to go back, but could see a number of tracks leading between different mounds and could not ascertain which of them I should take. In my perplexity I wanted to see someone of whom to ask the way, but could see no one. I determined to go on a few mounds farther and so try to see someone—not a veteran.

I gained my object, for after going a couple of hundred yards I saw before me a single shanty such as I had seen before, with, however, the difference that this was not one for living in, but merely a roof with three walls open in front. From the evidences which the neighborhood exhibited I took it to be a place for sorting. Within it was an old woman wrinkled and bent with age; I approached her to ask the way.

She rose as I came close and I asked her my way. She immediately commenced a conversation; and it occurred to me that here in the very center of the Kingdom of Dust was the place to gather details of the history of Parisian rag-picking—particularly as I could do so from the lips of one who looked like the oldest inhabitant.

I began my inquiries, and the old woman gave me most interesting answers—she had been one of the ceteuces who sat daily before the guillotine and had taken an active part among the women who signalized themselves by their violence in the revolution. While we were talking she said suddenly: "But *M'sieur* must be tired standing," and dusted a rickety old stool for me to sit down. I hardly liked to do so for many reasons; but the poor old woman was so civil that I did not like to run the risk of hurting her by refusing, and moreover the conversation of one who had been at the taking of the Bastille was so interesting that I sat down and so our conversation went on.

While we were talking, an old man —older and more bent and wrinkled even than the woman—appeared from behind the shanty. "Here is Pierre," said she. "*M'sieur* can hear stories now if he wishes, for Pierre was in everything, from the Bastille to Waterloo." The old man took another stool at my request and we plunged into a sea of revolutionary reminiscences. This old man, albeit clothed like a scarecrow, was like any one of the six veterans.

I was now sitting in the center of the low hut with the woman on my left hand and the man on my right, each of them being somewhat in front of me. The place was full of all sorts of curious objects of lumber, and of many things that I wished far away. In one corner was a heap of rags which seemed to move from the number of vermin it contained, and in the other a heap of bones whose odor was something shocking. Every now and then, glancing at the heaps, I could see the gleaming eyes of some of the rats which infested the place. These loathsome objects were bad enough, but what looked even more dreadful was an old butcher's ax with an iron handle stained with clots of blood leaning up against the wall on the right-hand side. Still these things did not give me much concern. The talk of the two old people was so fascinating that I stayed on and on, till the evening came and the dust heaps threw dark shadows over the vales between them.

After a time I began to grow uneasy, I could not tell how or why, but somehow I did not feel satisfied. Uneasiness is an instinct and means warning. The psychic faculties are often the sentries of the intellect, and when they sound alarm the reason begins to act, although perhaps not consciously.

This was so with me. I began to bethink me where I was and by what surrounded, and to wonder how I should fare in case I should be attacked; and then the thought suddenly burst upon me, although without any overt cause, that I was in danger. Prudence whispered: "Be still and make no sign," and so I was still and made no sign, for I knew that four cunning eyes were on me. "Four eyes—if not more." My God, what a horrible thought! The whole shanty might be surrounded on three sides with villains! I might be in the midst of a band of such desperadoes as only half a century of periodic revolution can produce.

With a sense of danger my intellect and observation quickened, and I grew more watchful than was my wont. I noticed that the old woman's eyes were constantly wandering toward my hands. I looked at them too, and saw the cause—my rings. On my left little finger I had a large signet and on the right a good diamond.

I thought that if there was any danger my first care was to avert suspicion. Accordingly I began to work the conversation round to rag-picking—to the drains—of the things found there; and so by easy stages to jewels. Then, seizing a favorable opportunity, I asked the old woman if she knew anything of such things. She answered that she did, a little. I held out my right hand, and, showing her the diamond, asked her what she thought of that. She answered that her eyes were bad, and stooped over my hand. I said as nonchalantly as I could: "Pardon me! You will see better thus!" and taking it off, handed it to her. An unholy light came into her withered old face, as she touched it. She stole one glance at me, swift and keen as a flash of lightning.

She bent over the ring for a moment, her face quite concealed as though examining it. The old man looked straight out of the front of the shanty before him, at the same time fumbling in his pockets and producing a screw of tobacco in a paper and

a pipe, which he proceeded to fill. I took advantage of the pause and the momentary rest from the searching eyes on my face to look carefully round the place, now dim and shadowy in the gloaming. There still lay all the heaps of varied reeking foulness; there the terrible blood-stained ax leaning against the wall in the right-hand corner, and everywhere, despite the gloom, the baleful glitter of the eyes of the rats. I could see them even through some of the chinks of the boards at the back low down close to the ground. But stay! these latter eyes seemed more than usually large and bright and baleful!

For an instant my heart stood still, and I felt in that whirling condition of mind in which one feels a sort of spiritual drunkenness, and as though the body is only maintained erect in that there is no time for it to fall before recovery. Then, in another second, I was calm—coldly calm, with all my energies in full vigor, with a self-control which I felt to be perfect and with all my feeling and instincts alert.

Now I knew the full extent of my danger: I was watched and surrounded by desperate people! I could not even guess at how many of them were lying there on the ground behind the shanty, waiting for the moment to strike. I knew that I was big and strong, and they knew it, too. They knew also, as I did, that I was an Englishman and would make a fight for it; and so we waited. I had, I felt, gained an advantage in the last few seconds, for I knew my danger and understood the situation. Now, I thought, is the test of my courage—the enduring test: the fighting test may come later!

The old woman raised her head and said to me in a satisfied kind of way:

"A very fine ring, indeed—a beautiful ring! Oh, me! I once had such rings, plenty of them, and bracelets and earrings! Oh! for in those fine days I led the town a dance! But they've forgotten me now! They've forgotten me! They? Why, they never heard of me! Perhaps their grandfathers remember me, some of them!" and she laughed a harsh, croaking laugh. And then I am bound to say that she astonished me, for she handed me back the ring with a certain suggestion of old-fashioned grace which was not without its pathos.

The old man eyed her with a sort of sudden ferocity, half rising from his stool, and said to me suddenly and hoarsely: "Let me see!"

I was about to hand the ring when the old woman said: "No! no, do not give it to Pierre! Pierre is eccentric. He loses things; and such a pretty ring!"

"Cat!" said the old man, savagely.

Suddenly the old woman said, rather more loudly than was necessary: "Wait! I shall tell you something about a ring."

There was something in the sound of her voice that jarred upon me. Perhaps it was my hyper-sensitiveness, wrought up as I was to such a pitch of nervous excitement, but I seemed to think that she was not addressing me. As I stole a glance round the place I saw the eyes of the rats in the bone heaps, but missed the eyes along the back. But even as I looked I saw them again appear. The old woman's "Wait!" had given me a respite from attack, and the men had sunk back to their reclining posture.

"I once lost a ring—a beautiful diamond hoop that had belonged to a queen, and which was given to me by a farmer of the taxes, who afterward cut his throat because I sent him away. I thought it must have been stolen, and taxed my people; but I could get no trace. The police came and suggested that it had found its way to the drain. We descended—I in my fine clothes, for I would not

trust them with my beautiful ring! I know more of the drains since then, and of rats, too! but I shall never forget the horror of that place—alive with blazing eyes, a wall of them just outside the light of our torches. Well, we got beneath my house. We searched the outlet of the drain, and there in the filth found my ring, and we came out.

"But we found something else also before we came! As we were coming toward the opening a lot of sewer rats—human ones this time—came toward us. They told the police that one of their number had gone into the drain, but had not returned. He had gone in only shortly before we had, and, if lost, could hardly be far off. They asked help to seek him, so we turned back. They tried to prevent me going, but I insisted. It was a new excitement, and had I not recovered my ring? Not far did we go till we came on something. There was but little water, and the bottom of the drain was raised with brick, rubbish, and much matter of the kind. He had made a fight for it, even when his torch had gone out. But they were too many for him! They had not been long about it! The bones were still warm; but they were picked clean. They had even eaten their own dead ones and there were bones of rats as well as of the man. They took it cool enough, those other—the human ones—and joked of their comrade when they found him dead, though they would have helped him living. Bah! what matters it—life or death?"

"And had you no fear?" I asked her.

"Fear!" she said with a laugh. "Me have fear? Ask Pierre! But I was younger then, and, as I came through that horrible drain with its wall of greedy eyes, always moving with the circle of the light from the torches, I did not feel easy. I kept on before the men, though! It is a way I have! I never let the men get it before me. All I want is a chance and a means! And they ate him up—took every trace away except the bones; and no one knew it, nor no sound of him was ever heard!" Here she broke into a chuckling fit of the ghastliest merriment which it was ever my lot to hear and see. A great poetess describes her heroine singing: "Oh! to see or hear her singing! Scarce I know which is the divinest."

And I can apply the same idea to the old crone—in all save the divinity, for I scarce could tell which was the most hellish—the harsh, malicious, satisfied, cruel laugh, or the leering grin, and the horrible square opening of the mouth like a tragic mask, and the yellow gleam of the few discolored teeth in the shapeless gums. In that laugh and with that grin and the chuckling satisfaction I knew as well as if it had been spoken to me in words of thunder that my murder was settled, and the murderers only bided the proper time for its accomplishment. I could read between the lines of her gruesome story the commands to her accomplices. "Wait," she seemed to say, "bide your time. I shall strike the first blow. Find the weapon for me, and I shall make the opportunity! He shall not escape! Keep him quiet, and then no one will be wiser. There will be no outcry, and the rats will do their work!"

It was growing darker and darker; the night was coming. I stole a glance round the shanty, still all the same! The bloody ax in the corner, the heaps of filth, and the eyes on the bone heaps and in the crannies of the floor.

Pierre had been still ostensibly filling his pipe; he now struck a light and began to puff away at it. The old woman said:

"Dear heart, how dark it is! Pierre, like a good lad, light the lamp!"

Pierre got up and with the lighted match in his hand touched the wick

of a lamp which hung at one side of the entrance to the shanty, and which had a reflector that threw the light all over the place. It was evidently that which was used for their sorting at night.

"Not that, stupid! Not that! The lantern!" she called out to him.

He immediately blew it out, saying: "All right, mother, I'll find it," and he hustled about the left corner of the room—the old woman saying through the darkness:

"The lantern! the lantern! Oh! That is the light that is most useful to us poor folks. The lantern was the friend of the revolution! It is the friend of the chiffonier! It helps us when all else fails."

Hardly had she said the word when there was a kind of creaking of the whole place, and something was steadily dragged over the roof.

Again I seemed to read between the lines of her words. I knew the lesson of the lantern.

"One of you get on the roof with a noose and strangle him as he passes out if we fail within."

As I looked out of the opening I saw the loop of a rope outlined black against the lurid sky. I was now, indeed, beset!

Pierre was not long in finding the lantern. I kept my eyes fixed through the darkness on the old woman. Pierre struck his light, and by its flash I saw the old woman raise from the ground beside her where it had mysteriously appeared, and then hide in the folds of her gown, a long sharp knife or dagger. It seemed to be like a butcher's sharpening-iron filed to a keen point.

The lantern was lit.

"Bring it here, Pierre," she said. "Place it in the doorway where we can see it. See how nice it is! It shuts out the darkness from us; it is just right!"

Just right for her and her purposes! It threw all its light on my face, leaving in gloom the faces of both Pierre and the woman, who sat outside of me on each side.

I felt that the time of action was approaching; but I knew now that the first signal and movement would come from the woman, and so watched her.

I was all unarmed, but I had made up my mind what to do. At the first movement I would seize the butcher's ax in the right-hand corner and fight my way out. At least, I would die hard. I stole a glance round to fix its exact locality so that I could not fail to seize it at the first effort, for then, if ever, time and accuracy would be precious.

Good God! It was gone! All the horror of the situation burst upon me; but the bitterest thought of all was that if the issue of the terrible position should be against me Alice would infallibly suffer. Either she would believe me false—and any lover, or anyone who has ever been one, can imagine the bitterness of the thought—or else she would go on loving long after I had been lost to her and to the world, so that her life would be broken and embittered, shattered with disappointment and despair. The very magnitude of the pain braced me up and nerved me to bear the dread scrutiny of the plotters.

I think I did not betray myself. The old woman was watching me as a cat does a mouse; she had her right hand hidden in the folds of her gown, clutching, I knew, that long, cruel-looking dagger. Had she seen any disappointment in my face she would, I felt, have known that the moment had come, and would have sprung on me like a tigress, certain of taking me unprepared.

I looked out into the night, and there I saw new cause for danger. Before and around the hut were at a little distance some shadowy forms; they were quite still, but I knew that they were all alert and on guard.

Small chance for me now in that direction.

Again I stole a glance round the place. In moments of great excitement and of great danger, which is excitement, the mind works very quickly, and the keenness of the faculties which depend on the mind grows in proportion. I now felt this. In an instant I took in the whole situation. I saw that the ax had been taken through a small hole made in one of the rotten boards. How rotten they must be to allow of such a thing being done without a particle of noise!

The hut was a regular murder-trap, and was guarded all around. A garroter lay on the roof ready to entangle me with his noose if I should escape the dagger of the old hag. In front the way was guarded by I know not how many watchers. And at the back was a row of desperate men—I had seen their eyes still through the crack in the boards of the floor, when last I looked—as they lay prone waiting for the signal to start erect. If it was to be ever, now for it!

As nonchalantly as I could I turned slightly on my stool so as to get my right leg well under me. Then with a sudden jump, turning my head, and guarding it with my hands, and with the fighting instinct of the knights of old, I breathed my lady's name, and hurled myself against the back wall of the hut.

Watchful as they were, the suddenness of my movement surprized both Pierre and the old woman. As I crashed through the rotten timbers I saw the old woman rise with a leap like a tiger and heard her low gasp of baffled rage. My feet lit on something that moved, and as I jumped away I knew that I had stepped on the back of one of the row of men lying on their faces outside the hut. I was torn with nails and splinters, but otherwise unhurt. Breathless I rushed up the mound in front of me, hearing as I went the dull crash of the shanty as it collapsed into a mass.

It was a nightmare climb. The mound, though but low, was awfully steep, and with each step I took the mass of dust and cinders tore down with me and gave way under my feet. The dust rose and choked me; it was sickening, fetid, awful; but my climb was, I felt, for life or death, and I struggled on. The seconds seemed hours; but the few moments I had in starting, combined with my youth and strength, gave me a great advantage, and, though several forms struggled after me in deadly silence which was more dreadful than any sound, I easily reached the top. Since then I have climbed the cone of Vesuvius, and as I struggled up that dreary steep amid the sulfurous fumes the memory of that awful night at Montrouge came back to me so vividly that I almost grew faint.

The mound was one of the tallest in the region of dust, and as I struggled to the top, panting for breath and with my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, I saw away to my left the dull red gleam of the sky, and nearer still the flashing of lights. Thank God! I knew where I was now and where lay the road to Paris!

For two or three seconds I paused and looked back. My pursuers were still well behind me, but struggling up resolutely, and in deadly silence. Beyond, the shanty was a wreck—a mass of timber and moving forms. I could see it well, for flames were already bursting out; the rags and straw had evidently caught fire from the lantern. Still silence there! Not a sound! These old wretches could die game, anyhow.

I had no time for more than a passing glance, for as I cast an eye round the mound preparatory to making my descent I saw several dark forms rushing round on either side to cut me off on my way. It was now a race for life. They were trying to head me on my way to Paris, and with the

instinct of the moment I dashed down to the right-hand side. I was just in time, for, though I came as it seemed to me down the steep in a few steps, the wary old men who were watching me turned back, and one, as I rushed by into the opening between the two mounds in front, almost struck me a blow with that terrible butcher's ax. There could surely not be two such weapons about.

Then began a really horrible chase. I easily ran ahead of the old men, and even when some younger ones and a few women joined in the hunt I easily distanced them. But I did not know the way, and could not even guide myself by the light in the sky, for I was running away from it. I had heard that, unless of conscious purpose, hunted men turn always to the left, and so I found it now; and so, I suppose, knew also my pursuers, who were more animals than men, and with cunning or instinct had found out such secrets for themselves; for on finishing a quick spurt, after which I intended to take a moment's breathing-space, I suddenly saw ahead of me two or three forms swiftly passing behind a mound to the right.

I was in the spider's web now indeed! But with the thought of this new danger came the resource of the hunted, and so I darted down the next turning to the right. I continued in this direction for some hundred yards, and then, making a turn to the left again, felt certain that I had, at any rate, avoided the danger of being surrounded.

But not of pursuit, for on came the rabble after me, steady, dogged, relentless, and still in grim silence.

In the greater darkness the mounds seemed now to be somewhat smaller than before, although—for the night was closing—they looked bigger in proportion. I was now well ahead of my pursuers, so I made a dart up the mound in front.

Oh joy of joys! I was close to the edge of this inferno of dust heaps. Away behind me the red light of Paris in the sky, and towering up behind rose the heights of Montmartre —a dim light, with here and there brilliant points like stars.

Restored to vigor in a moment, I ran over the few remaining mounds of decreasing size, and found myself on the level land beyond. Even then, however, the prospect was not inviting. All before me was dark and dismal, and I had evidently come on one of those dank, low-lying waste places which are found here and there in the neighborhood of great cities. Places of waste and desolation, where the space is required for the ultimate agglomeration of all that is noxious, and the ground is so poor as to create no desire of occupancy even in the lowest squatter. With eyes accustomed to the gloom of the evening, and away now from the shadows of those dreadful dust heaps, I could see much more easily than I could a little while ago. It might have been, of course, that the glare in the sky of the lights of Paris, though the city was some miles away, was reflected here. Howsoever it was, I saw well enough to take bearings for certainly some little distance around me.

In front was a bleak, flat waste that seemed almost dead level, with here and there the dark shimmering of stagnant pools. Seemingly far off on the right, amid a small cluster of scattered lights, rose a dark mass of Fort Montrouge, and away to the left in the dim distance, pointed with stray gleams from cottage windows, the lights in the sky showed the locality of Bicêtre. A moment's thought decided me to take to the right and try to reach Montrouge. There at least would be some sort of safety, and I might possibly long before come on some of the cross roads which I knew. Somewhere, not far off, must

lie the strategic road made to connect the outlying chain of forts circling the city.

Then I looked back. Coming over the mounds, and outlined black against the glare of the Parisian horizon, I saw several moving figures, and still a way to the right several more deploying out between me and my destination. They evidently meant to cut me off in this direction, and so my choice became constricted; it lay now between going straight ahead or turning to the left. Stooping to the ground, so as to get the advantage of the horizon as a line of sight, I looked carefully in this direction, but could detect no sign of my enemies. I argued that as they had not guarded or were not trying to guard that point, there was evidently danger to me there already. So I made up my mind to go straight on before me.

It was not an inviting prospect, and as I went on the reality grew worse. The ground became soft and oozy, and now and again gave way beneath me in a sickening kind of way. I seemed somehow to be going down, for I saw round me places seemingly more elevated than where I was, and this in a place which from a little way back seemed dead level. I looked around, but could see none of my pursuers. This was strange, for all along these birds of the night had followed me through the darkness as well as though it was broad daylight. How I blamed myself for coming out in my light-colored tourist suit of tweed! The silence, and my not being able to see my enemies, whilst I felt that they were watching me, grew appalling, and in the hope of someone not of this ghastly crew hearing me I raised my voice and shouted several times. There was not the slightest response; not even an echo rewarded my efforts. For a while I stood stock-still and kept my eyes in one direction. On one of the rising places around me I saw something dark move along, then another, and another. This was to my left, and seemingly moving to head me off.

I thought that again I might with my skill as a runner elude my enemies at this game, and so with all my speed darted forward.

Splash!

My feet had given way in a mass of slimy rubbish, and I had fallen headlong into a reeking, stagnant pool. The water and the mud in which my arms sank up to the elbows were filthy and nauseous beyond description, and in the suddenness of my fall I had actually swallowed some of the filthy stuff, which nearly choked me, and made me gasp for breath. Never shall I forget the moments during which I stood trying to recover myself almost fainting from the fetid odor of the filthy pool, whose white mist rose ghostlike around. Worst of all, with the acute despair of the hunted animal when he sees the pursuing pack closing on him, I saw before my eyes whilst I stood helpless the dark forms of my pursuers moving swiftly to surround me.

It is curious how our minds work on odd matters even when the energies of thought are seemingly concentrated on some terrible and pressing need. I was in momentary peril of my life; my safety depended on my action, and my choice of alternatives coming now with almost every step I took, and yet I could not but think of the strange dogged persistency of these old men. Their silent resolution, their stedfast, grim persistency even in such a cause commanded, as well as fear, even a measure of respect. What must they have been in the vigor of their youth! I could understand now that whirlwind rush on the bridge of Arcola, that scornful exclamation of the Old Guard at Waterloo! Unconscious cerebration has its own pleasures, even at such moments; but fortunately it does not

in any way clash with the thought from which action springs.

I realized at a glance that so far I was defeated in my object, but my enemies as yet had not won. They had succeeded in surrounding me on three sides, and were bent on driving me off to the left hand, where there was already some danger for me, for they had left no guard. I accepted the alternative—it was a case of Hobson's choice and run. I had to keep the lower ground, for my pursuers were on the higher places. However, though the ooze and broken ground impeded me, my youth and training made me able to hold my ground, and by keeping a diagonal line I not only kept them from gaining on me but even began to distance them. This gave me new heart and strength, and by this time habitual training was beginning to tell and my second wind had come. Before me the ground rose slightly. I rushed up the slope and found before me a waste of watery slime, with a low dike or bank looking black and grim beyond. I felt that if I could but reach that dike in safety I could there, with solid ground under my feet and some kind of path to guide me, find with comparative ease a way out of my troubles. After a glance right and left and seeing no one near, I kept my eyes for a few minutes to their rightful work of aiding my feet whilst I crossed the swamp. It was rough, hard work, but there was little danger, merely toil; and a short time took me to the dike. I rushed up the slope exulting; but here again I met a new shock. On each side of me rose a number of crouching figures. From right and left they rushed at me. Each body held a rope.

The cordon was nearly complete. I could pass on neither side, and the end was near.

There was only one chance, and I took it. I hurled myself across the dike, and escaping out of the very clutches of my foes threw myself into the stream.

At any other time I should have thought that water foul and filthy, but now it was as welcome as the most crystal stream to the parched traveler. It was a highway of safety!

My pursuers rushed after me. Had only one of them held the rope it would have been all up with me, for he could have entangled me before I had time to swim a stroke; but the many hands holding it embarrassed and delayed them, and when the rope struck the water I heard the splash well behind me. A few minutes' hard swimming took me across the stream. Refreshed with the immersion and encouraged by the escape, I climbed the dike in comparative gayety of spirits.

From the top I looked back. Through the darkness I saw my assailants scattering up and down along the dike. The pursuit was evidently not ended, and again I had to choose my course. Beyond the dike where I stood was a wild, swampy space very similar to that which I had crossed. I determined to shun such a place, and thought for a moment whether I would take up or down the dike. I thought I heard a sound —the muffled sound of oars, so I listened, and then shouted.

No response; but the sound ceased. My enemies had evidently got a boat of some kind. As they were on the up side of me I took the down path and began to run. As I passed to the left of where I had entered the water I heard several splashes, soft and stealthy, like the sound a rat makes as he plunges into the stream, but vastly greater; and as I looked I saw the dark sheen of the water broken by the ripples of several advancing heads. Some of my enemies were swimming the stream also.

And now behind me, up the stream, the silence was broken by the quick rattle and creak of oars; my enemies were in hot pursuit. I put my best

leg foremost and ran on. After a break of a couple of minutes I looked back, and by a gleam of light through the ragged clouds I saw several dark forms climbing the bank behind me. The wind had now begun to rise, and the water beside me was ruffled and beginning to break in tiny waves on the bank. I had to keep my eyes pretty well on the ground before me, lest I should stumble, for I knew that to stumble was death. After a few minutes I looked back behind me. On the dike were only a few dark figures, but crossing the waste, swampy ground were many more. What new danger this portended I did not know—could only guess. Then as I ran it seemed to me that my track kept ever sloping away to the right. I looked up ahead and saw that the river was much wider than before, and that the dike on which I stood fell quite away, and beyond it was another stream on whose near bank I saw some of the dark forms now across the marsh. I was on an island of some kind.

My situation was now indeed terrible, for my enemies had hemmed me in on every side. Behind came the quickening roll of the oars, as though my pursuers knew that the end was close. Around me on every side was desolation; there was not a roof or light, as far as I could see. Far off to the right rose some dark mass, but what it was I knew not. For a moment I paused to think what I should do; not for more, for my pursuers were drawing closer. Then my mind was made up. I slipped down the bank and took to the water. I struck out straight ahead, so as to gain the current by clearing the backwater of the island, for such I presume it was, when I had passed into the stream. I waited till a cloud came driving across the moon and leaving all in darkness. Then I took off my hat and laid it softly on the water floating with the stream, and a second after dived to the right and struck out under water with all my might. I was, I suppose, half a minute under water, and when I rose came up as softly as I could, and turning, looked back. There went my light brown hat floating merrily away. Close behind it came a rickety old boat, driven furiously by a pair of oars. The moon was still partly obscured by the drifting clouds, but in the partial light I could see a man in the bows holding aloft ready to strike what appeared to me to be that same dreadful pole-ax which I had before escaped. As I looked the boat drew closer, closer, and the man struck savagely. The hat disappeared. The man fell forward, almost out of the boat. His comrades dragged him in but without the ax, and then as I turned with all my energies bent on reaching the farther bank, I heard the fierce whir of the muttered "*Sacré!*" which marked the anger of my baffled pursuers.

This was the first sound I had heard from human lips during all this dreadful chase, and full as it was of menace and danger to me it was a welcome sound, for it broke that awful silence which shrouded and appalled me. It was as though an overt sign that my opponents were men and not ghosts, and that with them I had, at least, the chance of a man, though but one against many.

But now that the spell of silence was broken the sounds came thick and fast. From boat to shore and back from shore to boat came quick question and answer, all in the fiercest whispers. I looked back—a fatal thing to do, for in the instant someone caught sight of my face, which showed white on the dark water, and shouted. Hands pointed to me, and in a moment or two the boat was under weigh, and following hard after me. I had but a little way to go, but quicker and quicker came the boat after me. A few more strokes and I would be on the shore, but I felt the oncoming of the boat, and expected

each second to feel the crash of an oar or other weapon on my head. Had I not seen that dreadful ax disappear in the water I do not think that I could have won the shore. I heard the muttered curses of those not rowing and the labored breath of the rowers. With one supreme effort for life or liberty I touched the bank and sprang up it. There was not a single second to spare, for hard behind me the boat grounded and several dark forms sprang after me. I gained the top of the dike, and keeping to the left ran on again. The boat put off and followed down the stream. Seeing this I feared danger in this direction, and quickly turning, ran down the dike on the other side, and after passing a short stretch of marshy ground gained a wild, open flat country and sped on.

Still behind me came on my relentless pursuers. Far away, below me, I saw the same dark mass as before, but now grown closer and greater. My heart gave a great thrill of delight, for I knew that it must be the fortress of Bicêtre, and with new courage I ran on. I had heard that between each and all of the protecting forts of Paris there are strategic ways, deep-sunk roads, where soldiers marching should be sheltered from an enemy. I knew that if I could gain this road I would be safe, but in the darkness I could not see any sign of it, so, in blind hope of striking it, I ran on.

Presently I came to the edge of a deep cut, and found that down below me ran a road guarded on each side by a ditch of water fenced on either side by a straight, high wall.

Getting fainter and dizzier, I ran on; the ground got more broken—more and more still, till I staggered and fell, and rose again, and ran on in the blind anguish of the hunted. Again the thought of Alice nerved me. I would not be lost and wreck her life: I would fight and struggle for life to the bitter end. With a great effort I caught the top of the wall. As, scrambling like a catamount, I drew myself up, I actually felt a hand touch the sole of my foot. I was now on a sort of causeway, and before me I saw a dim light. Blind and dizzy, I ran on, staggered, and fell, rising, covered with dust and blood.

"Halte la!"

The words sounded like a voice from heaven. A blaze of light seemed to enwrap me, and I shouted with joy.

"Qui va la?" The rattle of musketry, the flash of steel before my eyes. Instinctively I stopped, though close behind me came a rush of my pursuers.

Another word or two, and out from the gateway poured, as it seemed to me, a tide of red and blue, as the guard turned out. All around seemed blazing with light, and the flash of steel, the click and rattle of arms, and the loud, harsh voices of command. As I fell forward, utterly exhausted, a soldier caught me. I looked back in dreadful expectation, and saw the mass of dark forms disappearing into the night. Then I must have fainted.

When I recovered my senses I was in the guardroom. They gave me brandy, and after a while I was able to tell them something of what had passed. Then a commissary of police appeared, apparently out of the empty air, as is the way of the Parisian police officer. He listened attentively, and then had a moment's consultation with the officer in command. Apparently they were agreed, for they asked me if I were ready now to come with them.

"Where to?" I asked, rising to go.

"Back to the dust heaps. We shall, perhaps, catch them yet!"

"I shall try!" said I.

He eyed me for a moment keenly, and said suddenly: "Would you like to wait a while, or till tomorrow, young Englishman?"

This touched me to the quick, as, perhaps, he intended, and I jumped to my feet. "Come now!" I said; "now! now! An Englishman is always ready for his duty!"

The commissary was a good fellow, as well as a shrewd one; he slapped my shoulder kindly. "*Brave garçon!*" he said. "Forgive me, but I knew what would do you most good. The guard is ready. Come!"

And so, passing right through the guardroom, and through a long, vaulted passage, we were out into the night. A few of the men in front had powerful lanterns. Through courtyards and down a sloping way we passed out through a low archway to a sunken road, the same that I had seen in my flight. The order was given to get at the double, and with a quick, springing stride, half run, half walk, the soldiers went swiftly along. I felt my strength renewed again—such is the difference between hunter and hunted. A very short distance took us to a low-lying pontoon bridge across the stream, and evidently very little higher up than I had struck it. Some effort had evidently been made to damage it, for the ropes had all been cut, and one of the chains had been broken. I heard the officer say to the commissary:

"We are just in time! A few more minutes, and they would have destroyed the bridge. Forward, quicker still!" and on we went. Again we reached a pontoon on the winding stream; as we came up we heard the hollow boom of the metal drums as the effort to destroy the bridge was again renewed. A word of command was given, and several men raised their rifles.

"Fire!" A volley rang out. There was a muffled cry, and the dark forms dispersed. But the evil was done, and we saw the far end of the pontoon swing into the stream. This was a serious delay, and it was nearly an hour before we had renewed ropes and restored the bridge sufficiently to allow us to cross.

We renewed the chase. Quicker, quicker, we went toward the dust heaps.

After a time we came to a place that I knew. There were the remains of a fire—a few smoldering wood ashes still cast a red glow, but the bulk of the ashes were cold. I knew the site of the hut and the hill behind it up which I had rushed, and in the flickering glow the eyes of the rats still shone with a sort of phosphorescence.

The commissary spoke a word to the officer, and he cried: "Halt!"

The soldiers were ordered to spread around and watch, and then we commenced to examine the ruins. The commissary himself began to lift away the charred boards and rubbish. These the soldiers took and piled together. Presently he started back, then bent down, and rising beckoned me.

"See!" he said.

It was a gruesome sight. There lay a skeleton face downward, a woman by the lines—an old woman by the coarse fiber of the bone. Between the ribs rose a long spikelike dagger made from a butcher's sharpening-knife, its keen point buried in the spine.

"You will observe," said the commissary to the officer and to me as he took out his note-book, "that the woman must have fallen on her dagger. The rats are many here—see their eyes glistening among that heap of bones—and you will also notice" —I shuddered as he placed his hand on the skeleton—"that but little time was lost by them, for the bones are scarcely cold!"

There was no other sign of anyone near, living or dead; and so deploying again into line the soldiers passed on. Presently we came to the hut made of the old wardrobe. We ap-

proached. In five of the six compartments was an old man sleeping—sleeping so soundly that even the glare of the lanterns did not wake them. Old and grim and grizzled they looked, with their gaunt, wrinkled, bronzed faces and their white mustaches.

The officer called out harshly and loudly a word of command, and in an instant each one of them was on his feet before us and standing at "attention!"

"What do you here?"

"We sleep," was the answer.

"Where are the other chiffoniers?" asked the commissary.

"Gone to work."

"And you?"

"We are on guard!"

"*Peste!*" laughed the officer grimly, as he looked at the old men one after the other in the face and added with cool, deliberate cruelty, "Asleep on duty! Is this the manner of the Old Guard? No wonder, then, a Waterloo!"

By the gleam of the lantern I saw the grim old faces grow deadly pale, and almost shuddered at the look in the eyes of the old men as the laugh of the soldiers echoed the grim pleasantry of the officer.

I felt in that moment that I was in some measure avenged.

For a moment they looked as if they would throw themselves on the taunter, but years of their life had schooled them and they remained still.

"You are but five," said the commissary; "where is the sixth?" The answer came with a grim chuckle.

"He is there!" and the speaker pointed to the bottom of the wardrobe. "He died last night. You won't find much of him. The burial of the rats is quick!"

The commissary stooped and looked in. Then he turned to the officer and said calmly:

"We may as well go back. No trace here now; nothing to prove that man was the one wounded by your soldiers' bullets! Probably they murdered him to cover up the trace. See!" Again he stooped and placed his hands on the skeleton. "The rats work quickly and they are many. These bones are warm!"

I shuddered, and so did many more of those around me.

"Form!" said the officer; and so in marching order, with the lanterns swinging in front and the manacled veterans in the midst, with steady tramp we took ourselves out of the dust heaps and turned backward to the fortress of Bicêtre.

MY YEAR of probation has long since ended, and Alice is my wife. But when I look back upon that trying twelvemonth one of the most vivid incidents that memory recalls is that associated with my visit to the City of Dust.

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 292)

I eame home yesterday, picked up the June issue of WEIRD TALES, and thought I would look over the tale, *The Lurking Fear,* by H. P. Lovecraft. I read the story between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning. I have never before enjoyed a story so thoroughly. It seems to me it is the needle-point climax to weird-story development, as I can't see how a tale could be better than this one and leave one sane when he got through with it. All hail to the Prinee of Prinees—to Lovecraft, the master of weird literature."

L. D. Kingery, of Hollywood, California, writes to The Eyrie: "I can not express my profound interest in the first part of *The Witches' Sabbath,* by Stephen Bagby, in your July issue. The theme, if it were only known, harkens very near the real. This story is vivid, masterful and compelling; only one other story ever published by WEIRD TALES, no matter how good, could live up to it, and that was *The Outsider,* by H. P. Lovecraft."

"A few words of appreciation for WEIRD TALES," writes H. F. Scotten, of Indianapolis. "It is very diffieult to pick a favorite story or author in its pages, because of the different types. Your three outstanding authors, supreme in their individual fields, are Loveeraft, Quinn, and Hamilton. Lovecraft is a master. The classies that I have read fail to reveal a better handling of English than his. And even morbidly imaginative Poe failed, at any time, to surpass the gripping strangeness of his themes. *The Lurking Fear,* in the June issue, is one of his best. De Grandin is one of the realest characters I have ever found in fietion. Quinn aceomplishes much, and dares more, in injecting the comedy of de Grandin into tales of the occult. One who had never read Quinn would say it could not be done. De Grandin is just the proper touch of lightness in WEIRD TALES. I like him. Hamilton's imagination seems to know no limits. His stories are of the type that always interested me most. When it comes to eonjeetural opinions on what lies beyond the stars, or within the atom, one man's guess is as good as another's; so perhaps there is a lot of truth in his fiction. There are others that I would like to comment on if I had the time, but there are some stories that I just must mention. Since I became acquainted with WEIRD TALES several years ago through reading *The People of the Comet,* I have found some real gems of literature within its pages. Among them were *The Brown Moccasin, The Thin Match,* and *The Wind That Tramps the World,* which story was one of the most beautiful things I ever read. Its ethereal sweetness still thrills me as I recall it to mind. It should be bound in a dainty eover, and placed in a row with the world's classics."

Writes Arnold Jensen, of San Franeisco, "How long, Mr. Editor, must we wait before you give us a volume of Lovecraft's remarkable stories, as a companion to *The Moon Terror?* (That book, by the way, is a gem of pseudo-scientifie literature; it is positively thrilling.) And there are other serials

from your pages that should be brought out in book form, as was *The Moon Terror.* And how about books of thrilling stories selected from your magazine—'Werewolf Stories,' 'Interplanetary Stories,' 'Weird Orientales,' etc.?"

"Although I haven't yet finished my July copy of WEIRD TALES," writes Jack Snow, of Piqua, Ohio, "I want to tell you that I have thoroughly enjoyed what I have read of it. Frank Belknap Long's *The Space-Eaters* gave me one of the largest thrills I have enjoyed for a long while. Mr. Long has an especial knack of combining the corporeal horrible with the spiritually weird and terror-inspiring. The result he achieves is to my notion just about the most complete and inclusive setting of horror that can be imagined. He touches all things with his method, the substance and the immaterial with a sharp point of terror. There is no place in his stories where the reader can find refuge even for a moment from the slithering horrors that close about him."

"For real weirdness, hair-raising horror and honest-to-goodness reading interest," writes O. Beckwith, of Ovid, Michigan, "Long's *The Space-Eaters* goes over Lovecraft's best. And that, as every reader knows, is saying a lot."

Readers, what is your favorite story in the present issue of WEIRD TALES? And if there are any stories that you don't like, we want you to let us know which ones they are, and why you don't like them. It is your careful study of the magazine and your advice and criticism that enable us to keep it up to the standard you desire. In the July issue, two stories are in a neck-and-neck race for first place in popularity, as shown by your votes as this issue goes to press: The first part of *The Witches' Sabbath,* by Stephen Bagby; and *The Space-Eaters,* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., which is trailing *The Witches' Sabbath* by only a few votes.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE SEPTEMBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	**Why?** ----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Invisible Threads

(Continued from page 314)

fore he wishes to marry her, which he can not do so long as he already has a wife. Mrs. Goetsche refused to divorce him and he brought action himself, manufacturing out of whole cloth the vast sewer of scandal which he has caused to be paraded through the newspapers of this city. He would win, were it not for Epiphané! Another step into the maze for you, Abbott. Go at once to the courtroom and listen to every word of the final hearing. Come back and tell me what the crowd says at the denouement, and what you make out of it yourself. Go at once!''

For the first time since my entry into this strange house I found myself on the street and among work-aday folk. I looked back once at the house with its sightless eyes for windows and the rusted spikes on the uncared-for fence—and found it hard to believe all that had occurred. It was too weird, fantastic, bizarre. But was it?

I was still thinking of this as I entered the crowded courtroom, where the scandalmongers of the city filled the hall of justice to the very doors, while those who could not enter stood in the foyer, straining their necks, twitching their ears for every tasty morsel thrown out to them by those who were near enough to catch the words of the witnesses. I used my elbows to good effect and got inside. I fairly fought my way toward the prosecutor's desk beyond the varnished railing, stopping only when the protests of those whom I jostled drew the attention of a burly bailiff in my direction. It was close enough.

Mrs. Goetsche herself was on the stand and the lawyer for the plaintiff was pelting her with questions such as I would not have asked a drab woman of the streets. A heavy veil

hung down over her face but it trembled convulsively after each question of the inhuman lawyer for the plaintiff, as though the little woman fought for self-control before she made answer. When she did answer her voice was so low I could barely catch the words. My heart went out to her in pity. Brave little woman — torn by ruthless bloodhounds! The crowd licked its lips with lecherous enjoyment.

I looked at the unnatural husband. He just sat there and stared at his wife, his face drawn into an unreadable mask. What went on inside that brain of his? No one knew save himself. He merely stared, fixed purpose easily readable in the unchanging mask of his face. He was tearing this little woman into tiny bits and, though he might not be enjoying it, he showed no signs of letting up. I studied the millionaire carefully, wondering what manner of woman would stand by to wait for such a man, providing she knew what filth he was ready to draw another woman through to claim her.

As I watched him a queer expression came over his face. His eyes suddenly bulged as though they would jump from their sockets. His facial mask assumed the stolidity of congealing metal. His hand rose as though he would brush it across his forehead, but it fell back, a sodden weight, before the movement was completed. It struck an inkwell on the desk of his lawyer. A thin stream of the dark fluid leapt into the air and fell back upon the table, staining the papers thereon and forming a little rivulet which ran across the table and dripped upon the floor. Goetsche's head fell back and became rigid, as though he stared fixedly at some spot on the ceiling of the courtroom. Silence fell upon the audience. The judge stirred uneasily. The jury craned its neck. The lawyer for the plaintiff paused in the midst of his harangue and stepped back to the side of Goetsche. He put his hand to the breast of Goetsche's coat, then drew it away with a startled oath which the judge affected not to hear.

"Is there a doctor here?" cried the lawyer. "Mr. Goetsche has fainted."

There was a stir near me as a professional-appearing man tried to force his way to the front. But before he was able to reach Goetsche the latter stirred uneasily. His head came forward slowly. His eyes gradually assumed their natural position. His hand came up again and completed the movement of brushing across his brow, which was now damp with the fine dew of perspiration. His head turned until his eyes were focused upon the veiled figure on the witness stand. An unreadable expression came over his mask of a face.

Then the sensation!

Slowly Goetsche lifted himself to an upright position. Slowly he moved forward toward the veiled figure of his wife. The lawyer for the plaintiff placed his hand on his employer's arm as though to restrain him. Goetsche made an impatient gesture, as though he brushed off a pestiferous fly. The lawyer was thrown across his own desk. When he regained his feet his white vest was stained with the ink which Goetsche had spilled. He turned angrily back toward Goetsche, but came suddenly to pause. For Goetsche had knelt at the feet of his wife and had placed his arms about her. He arose, holding her as though she had been a child. Every man and woman in the courtroom heard the few words which he said:

"Come, little sweetheart, let us forget. It has all been a monstrous dream. We are going home!"

What had Goetsche seen during those few moments when his gaze had been fixed, motionless, upon some spot on the ceiling of the courtroom? Had he ever afterward described his vision, would it have resembled the

corporeal features of Hoffman, agent for Epiphané?· Since he refused interviews to the reporters, what is one to believe?

I only know that when I returned to the house of Epiphané he met me in his office, and his smile as he greeted me was very gentle.

The fascinating conclusion of this story will appear in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES.

Cravetheen the Harper

By A. LESLIE

Cravetheen the Harper plays a
ghostly tune,
When the earth is barred and speckled
With silver o' the moon.
The fretted fires flow over him,
And from his moaning harp
Pour floods of singing moonlight
Keening high and sharp.

Cravetheen the Harper
Plays the harp that grieves,
And the souls of murdered women,
Like little rustling leaves,
Come and follow after,
Moaning in the storm,
But the harp of Cravetheen
Keeps him safe from harm.

When the ghost-strings murmur
Their feet must tread the tune,
When the earth is barred and
speckled
With silver o' the moon.

Cravetheen the Harper
Comes not in the sun,
For his harp is voiceless
Till the day is done:
Leprechaun and banshee
Listen to the croon,
When the earth is barred and
speckled
With silver o' the moon.

Body and Soul

(Continued from page 329)

leg was lifted across the window-sill; two long, unfleshed arms, terminating in hands of enormous length, were thrust out toward the Irishman; a grin of such hellish hatred and triumph as I had never conceived possible disfigured the object's visage as it pressed onward, its long, bony fingers opening and closing convulsively, as though they already felt their victim's neck within their grasp.

"*Monsieur,* you do play truant from hell!" De Grandin's announcement was made in the most casual manner as he rose from his half-kneeling posture beside the window and placed himself directly in the mummy's path, but there was a quaver in his voice which betrayed the intensity of his emotion.

A noise—you could hardly call it a snarl nor yet a scream, but a sound midway between the two—emanated from the thing's desiccated throat as it turned on him, threw out one hand and snatched at his throat.

There was a tiny spark of light, as though a match had been struck, then a mighty, bursting blaze, as if time had turned backward in its flight for a second and the midday sun had thrown its beams through the midnight blackness of the room, a swishing, whistling sound, as of air suddenly released from tremendous pressure, and a shriek of mad, unsupportable anguish. Then the fierce blazing of some inflammable substance suddenly set alight. My eyes started from my face as I seemed to see the mummy's scraggy limbs and emaciated torso writhe within a very inferno of fire. Then:

"*Cher Sergent,* it might be well to call the fire department; this place will surely burn about our ears unless *les pompiers* hurry with their hose, I fear," remarked Jules de Grandin as calmly as though advising us the night was fine.

"BUT—but—howly Mither o' Moses!" Sergeant Costello demanded as we turned from watching the firemen salvaging the remnants of Kolisko's cottage; "how did ye manage it, Doctor de Grandin, sor? May I never eat another mess o' corned beef an' cabbage if I didn't shoot th' thing clean through th' head wid me gun, an' it never so much as batted an eye, yet ye burned it up as clean as——"

"Precisely, *mon vieux,*" the Frenchman admitted with a chuckle. "Have you never heard the adage that one must fight the Devil with fire? It was something like that which I did.

"No later than night before last a young man came crying and whimpering at Friend Trowbridge's door, begging for shelter from some ghastly thing which pursued him through the streets. Both Trowbridge and I thought he suffered from an overdose of the execrable liquor with which Monsieur Volstead has flooded this unhappy land, but before we could boot him from the door, behold, the same thing which you so unsuccessfully shot tonight did stick its unlovely countenance against our window, and I, who always go armed lest some miscreant do me a mischief, did fire eight shots directly into his face. Believe me, my friend, when Jules de Grandin shoots, he does not miss, and that night I shot exceptionally well. Yet when Friend Trowbridge and I searched the garden, neither hide nor hair of the one who should have been eight times dead did we find. 'There is something here which will take much explaining,' I say to me after we could not find him.

"Next morning you did come and

tell us of Professor Kolisko's murder, and when we had viewed his remains, I wondered much what sort of creature could have done the thing. The pressure exerted on his neck were superhuman, but the marks of the hand were not those of an ape, for no ape possesses such a long, thin thumb.

"Then we did find the dead professor's diary and I have the tiny shivers playing tag with each other up and down my back as I read and translate it. It sounds like the dream of one crazed with dope, I know, but there was the possibility of truth in it. Do you know the vampire, my friends?"

"The vampire?" I echoed.

"*Précisément;* the vampire, you have said it. He is not always one who can not die because of sin or misfortune in life. No. Sometimes he is a dead body possessed by some demon —perhaps by some unhappy, earth-bound spirit. Yes.

"Now, as I read the professor's journal, I see that everything which had transpired were most favorable for the envampirement of that body which his cousin had brought from Egypt so long ago. Yet the idea seemed—how do you say?—ah, yes —to have the smell of the fish on it.

"But when you come and say Miss Adkinson have been erased in the same manner as Professor Kolisko, I begin to wonder if perhaps I have not less nuts in my belfry than I at first thought. In Professor Kolisko's journal there was reference to his cousin. 'How does it come that this cousin have not come forward and told us what, if anything, he knows?' I ask me as we view the poor dead woman's body, and the answer was, 'He has most doubtless seen that which will not be believed, and hides because he fears arrest on a false charge of murder.'

"Right away I rush to New York and inquire at the *Musée Metropolitain* for the address of Monsieur Michel Kolisko, the Egyptologist. I

find his living-quarters in East Eighty-sixth Street. There they tell me he have gone to the Carmelite retreat. *Morbleu,* had he hidden in lost Atlantis, I should have hunted him out, for I desired speech with him!

"At first he would not talk, dreading I intended to drag him to the jail, but after I had spoken with him for a time, he opened his heart, and told me what he later told you.

"Now, what to do? By Monsieur Kolisko's story, it were useless to battle with this enlivened mummy, for the body of him was but the engine moved by an alien spirit—he had no need of brains, hearts and such things as we must use. Also, I knew from experience, bullets were as useless against him as puffs of wind against a fortress wall. 'Very well,' I tell me, 'he may be invulnerable to bullets and blows, but living or dead, he is still a mummy—a dry, desiccated mummy—and we have had no rain lately. It are entirely unlikely that he have gotten greatly moistened in his trips through the streets, and all mummies are as tinder to fire. *Mordieu,* did they not once use them as fuel for locomotives in Egypt when railways were first built there? Yes.'

"And so I prepare the warm reception for him. At one time and another I have taken photographs at night, and to do so I have used magnesium flares—what you call flashlight powder. At a place where they sell such things in New York I procure a flashlight burner—a hollow cylinder for the powder magazine with a benzine wick at its top and a tube through which air can be blown to force the powder through the burning petrol and so give a continuous blaze. I get me also a rubber bag which I can inflate and attach to the windpipe of the apparatus, thus leaving my lips free for swearing and other important things, and also giving a greater force of air.

"I reason: 'Where will this living mummy go most naturally? Why not to the house where he received his new life, for the town in which he goes about committing murder is still new to him?' And so, when *Monsieur la Momie* returns to the place of his second nativity, I am all ready for him. Your shots, they are as ineffectual as were mine two nights ago, but I have my magnesium flare ready, and as he turns on me I blow the fierce flame from it all over him. He are dry like tinder, the fire seized on him like a hungry little boy on a jam-tart, and—*pouf*—he is burn up, incinerated; he is no more!"

"Do you actually mean Heschler's soul entered that dried-up body?" I demanded.

The Frenchman shook his head. "I do not know," he replied. "Perhaps it were Heschler; more likely not. The air is full of strange and terrible things, my friend. Not for nothing did the old divines call Satan the Prince of the Powers of the Air. How do we know some of those elementals who are ever on the watch to do mankind an injury did not hear the mad Koliskos' scheme and take advantage of the opportunity to enter into the mummy's body? Such things have been before; why may they not be again?"

"But——" I commenced.

"But——" expostulated Sergeant Costello.

"But, my friends," the little man cut in, "did you behold how dry that so abominable mummy was before I applied the fire?"

"Yes," I answered wonderingly.

"*Cordieu,* he was wet as the broad Atlantic Ocean beside the dryness of Jules de Grandin at this moment! Friend Trowbridge, unless my memory plays me false, I beheld a bottle of cognac upon your office table. Come, I faint, I die, I perish; talk to me no more till I have consumed the remainder of that bottle, I do beseech you!"

The White Vampire

(Continued from page 394)

this thing. Mercy, *Effendi!* have mercy!" He threw himself on the ground in his terror and strove to embrace McFee's dusty riding-boots. "If die I must, at least let me die while I still resemble a man!"

Lieutenant McFee crossed to the table, took up one of the revolvers and threw open the breech. Eight little brass cylinders were ejected by the self-acting mechanism. Seven of these he placed in his pocket. The other one he slipped back into the firing-chamber, closed the breech, and laid the weapon on the table.

"There's one round left," he said significantly.

Ishak-El-Naga bowed his head as a sign that he understood, and his hand closed eagerly over the ivory butt.

"I bear witness that there is no God but Allah," he cried. "And Mohammed is the Prophet of God!"

Lieutenant McFee raised his hand to the brim of his topee in grave salute.

"I knew you'd take it sensibly," he said in Arabic. "Thou hast my permission to depart."

As he closed the door behind him there came from within the sound of a muffled shot. Ishak-El-Naga was dead.

Coming Soon

The Dancing Death

by THEODORE ROSCOE

A Tale of Tarantulas

The Devil-Plant

(Continued from page 302)

ration were standing out all over her tawny hide. "The Master is hunting, and he told me to feed this chicken to the *thing* at noon."

I tried to dissuade her, but she shook her head. She was terribly afraid, but Wanless had said something must be done and there was no stopping her. Finally I let her go. God forgive me for it! At that I don't know just what I could have done to stop her, for the fever hasn't left me much strength. Down the path she went, winding back across the mud flats toward the jungle, walking with a slow and lagging tread. Then the first bushes swallowed her, and she was gone.

For perhaps twenty minutes I was not particularly worried. I did not exactly forget about the girl, but I did manage to dismiss her from my mind. And then suddenly came the realization that half an hour had passed without her return. I felt cold all over, and my hands began to shake. I remembered what I had seen in the hut, and I remembered what Wanless had told me of the new hunger of the *thing*. At the end of forty-five minutes I could no longer sit still.

Throwing aside the thin robe that covered me, I swung to my feet and started to cross the wide porch to the open door of the house. The fever has weakened me even more than I realized, for my knees were unsteady and tremulous and I fell prone on the floor before I had taken half a dozen steps. Slowly and laboriously I pulled myself to my feet and tried again. The result was the same. I was still lying full length on the splintery boards of the porch floor when Wanless appeared, making his way back between the native huts. When he saw me he threw down the small game he had been carrying, and came running up to the house.

Wanless was strong, for all his small frame. With scarcely an effort he gathered me up in his arms and dumped me back on the chair where I had been sitting. In my haste I choked on the words, but finally I gasped out what had happened. His face darkened, and without a word he turned on his heel and hurried away down the path to the jungle. As he went there came a faint puff of wind that bore with it a trace of that never-to-be-forgotten stench. It was almost as though the *thing* knew of his coming, and mocked him.

For a while nothing happened. It seemed that the sun paused, that the earth ceased its movement, and that time slumbered; and then at last Wanless came running back. He ran at full speed, looking at nothing, his face set in grim and terrible lines. Most of his clothing was ripped from his body; strange red welts covered his arms and shoulders; and one side of his head was crimson with blood where his ear had been nearly torn off and hung dangling from a single flap of skin.

I called to him, but Wanless never noticed me. He was past all thought or reason, and intent on only one idea. Across the porch and into the house he charged like a maddened boar, and I heard him throwing things around in the store-room. An instant later he reappeared, ran out with a long-bladed machete gleaming in each hand. Leaping down the steps in one bound, he ran back toward the jungle. His torn clothes fluttered behind him and the blood from his wound left a scarlet trail across the bushes.

This time he did not return. Time passed, with nothing disturbing the sultry calm, and when I could bear

it no longer I again tried to stand up. This time I seemed a little stronger. Holding to the chairs and then to the walls themselves for support, I managed to enter the house. From a bottle on the table I poured out half a tumbler of brandy. The fiery spirits seemed to give new strength to my weakened legs.

With an energy born of desperation I commenced to dress. I slipped on my trousers, and a pair of high boots. My Colt lay on a chair, but I did not even take it—how can one shoot at a thing without vitals? Instead I went to the store-room and found another machete. With this, and a heavy staff to keep me upright, I started toward that ill-omened jungle clearing.

IT TOOK a long time to make that journey of about a third of a mile. God knows it seemed like ages! It was as though I struggled against unseen currents, and every movement was sluggish. Fever is a weakening thing, and I fell frequently in spite of my staff. When this happened I would lie still for a moment, fighting for breath, then once again stagger to my feet and start forward. At last there came that ghastly stench of decay, and I knew I was approaching the clearing.

The place was silent and still under the glare of the afternoon sun. An ominous silence. The grass seemed to undulate and quiver in the heat, and even the trees around the edge of the clearing drooped listlessly. The door of the hut was open and a severed branch lay athwart the entrance. It had been cut off by a stroke of a machete and was covered by a slimy yellow liquid, a sort of blood. And then I looked inside the hut. . . .

I will not attempt to write what lay therein. God knows it will be long before I sleep well at night, for the memory of it. The girl had nursed me, and Wanless had been my friend. Yet the culminating horror was not their fate but the fact that the *thing*

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

THE LAST TEST, *by Adolphe de Castro*

Dr. de Castro, who was author with Ambrose Bierce of "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter," has written for WEIRD TALES a superb novelette, through which, like a cold breeze from the tomb, sweep suggestions of unthinkable horrors from the elder world.

THE FLYING DEATH, *by B. Wallis*

A strange, unearthly monster comes from the sky, and the horror of its coming robs mankind of its age-old feeling of security, and brings stark terror to the earth.

THE CITY OF LOST SOULS, *by Genevieve Larsson*

Twelve men—say rather twelve beasts ravening for blood—avenged a brutal murder in a brutal way, and their punishment was weird and terrible. A blood-chilling, fascinating story of the supernatural.

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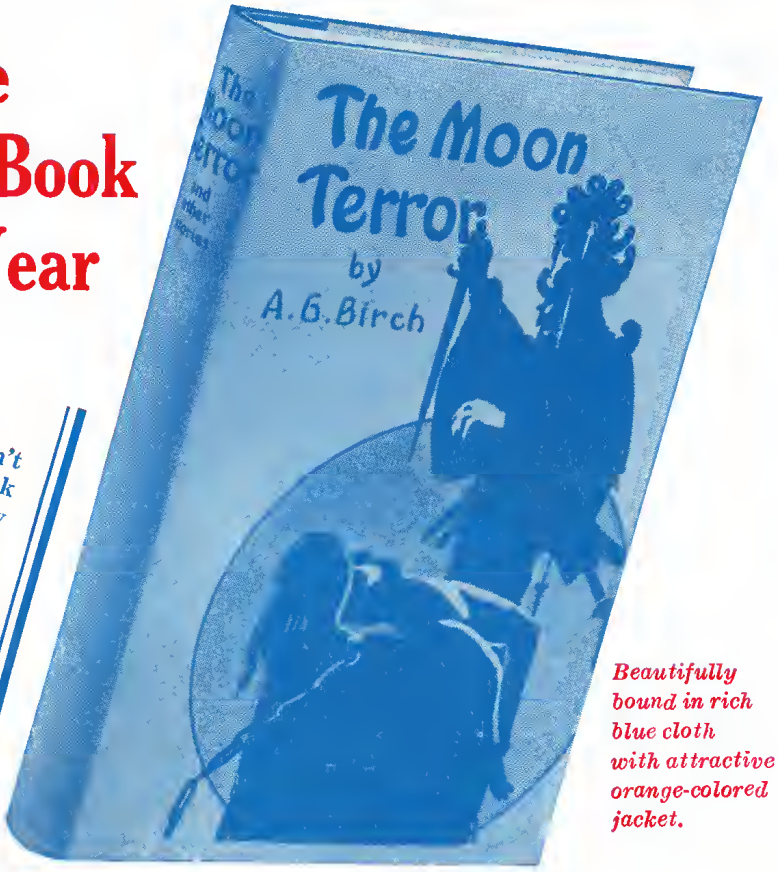

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was gone. Even now, right at this minute, it must be somewhere at large.

For minutes on end I stood staring, unable to move my eyes. At last I uttered a strangled cry and staggered out into the clearing. Many dry bushes and shrubs lay near by, and I piled them high around the walls of the hut and set the whole thing afire. I think I was slightly mad just then—and I am none too sure of my sanity even now. A great column of greasy black smoke mounted up into the air as I began my painful journey back here to the house.

It is now evening, with the last light fading, and I am feverishly working to finish up these notes. I have ready a large square of oiled silk and a block of wood, and if anything happens I will wrap the book in the silk and throw the whole thing out the window into the river.

Later. Something is coming! I can hear a slow splashing in the puddles out on the mud flats. A moment ago a dog was howling furiously; he ended with one ghastly scream and has since been silent.

I have a machete, and the door *may* hold. If not——? The porch is creaking as though under a weight, I think I will . . .

[*The manuscript ends abruptly at this point, and the above may be regarded as Jonathan Darrowby's last words. Professor Briggs located the site of Palaos after some difficulty, and found that the few natives had moved away and the jungle had reclaimed the place. The big house had evidently been destroyed by fire, perhaps from an overturned lamp. There was nothing to be gained by staying, and Professor Briggs left that same night.*]